The Paris Review

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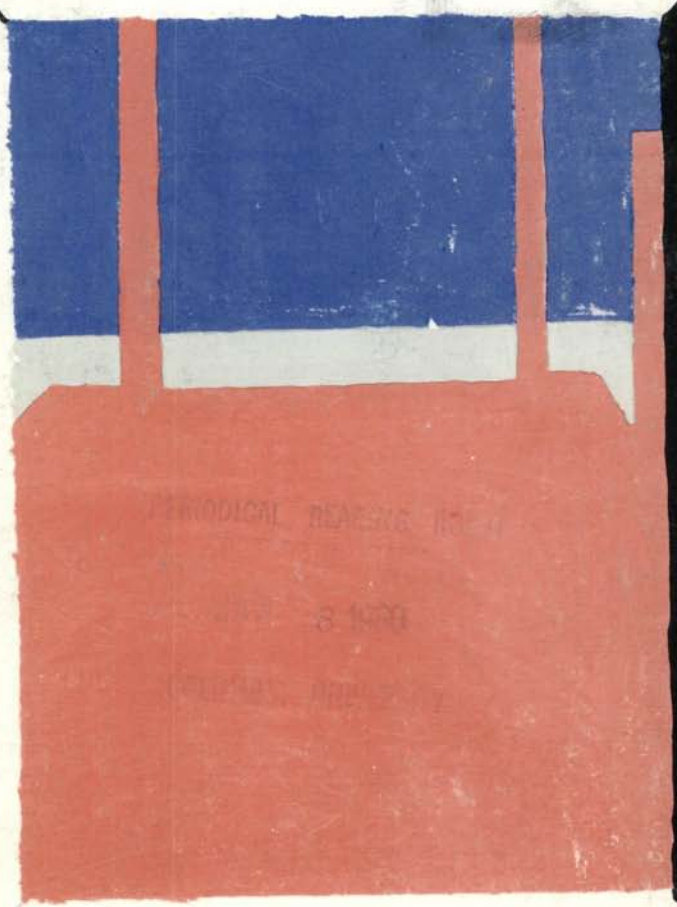

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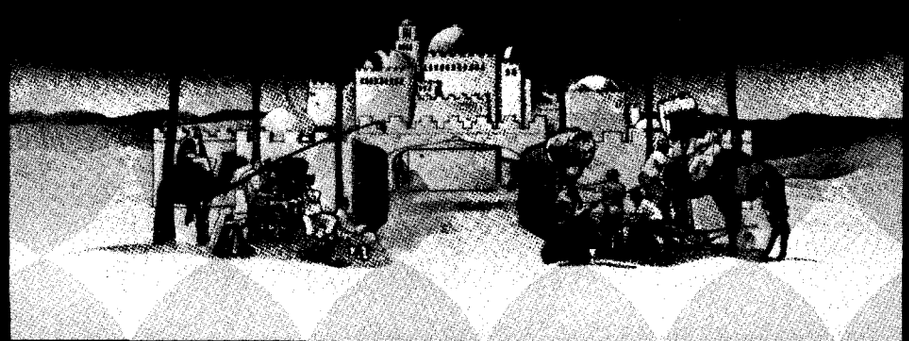

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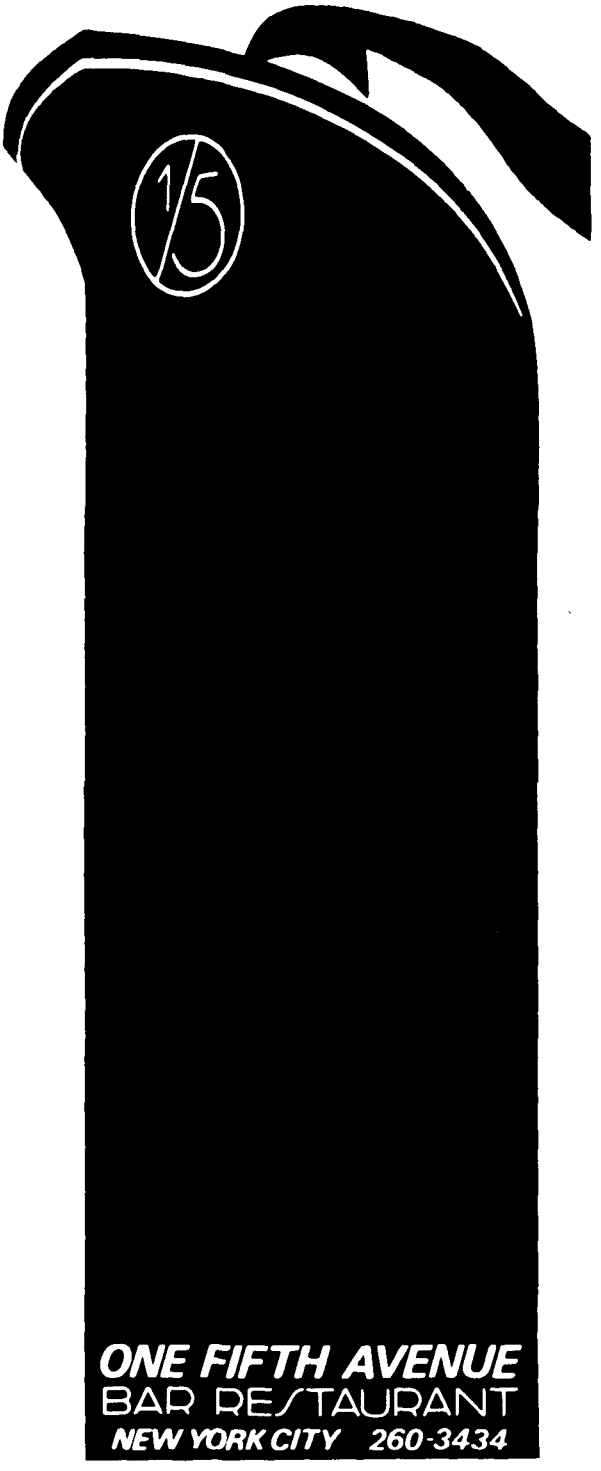

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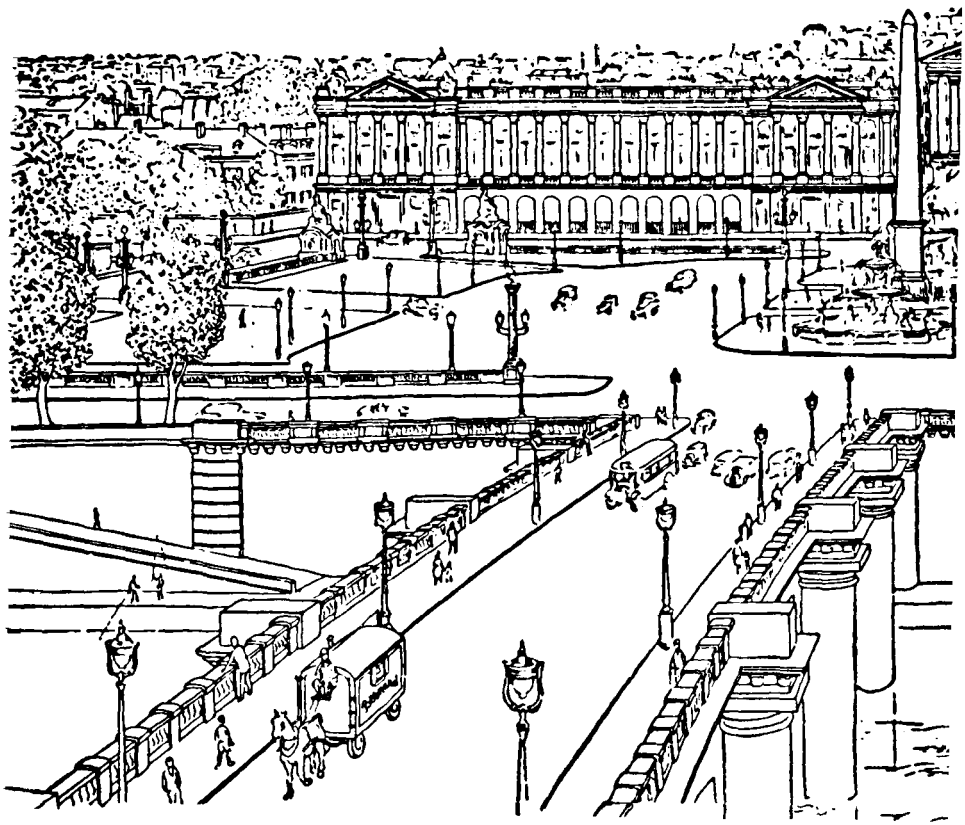

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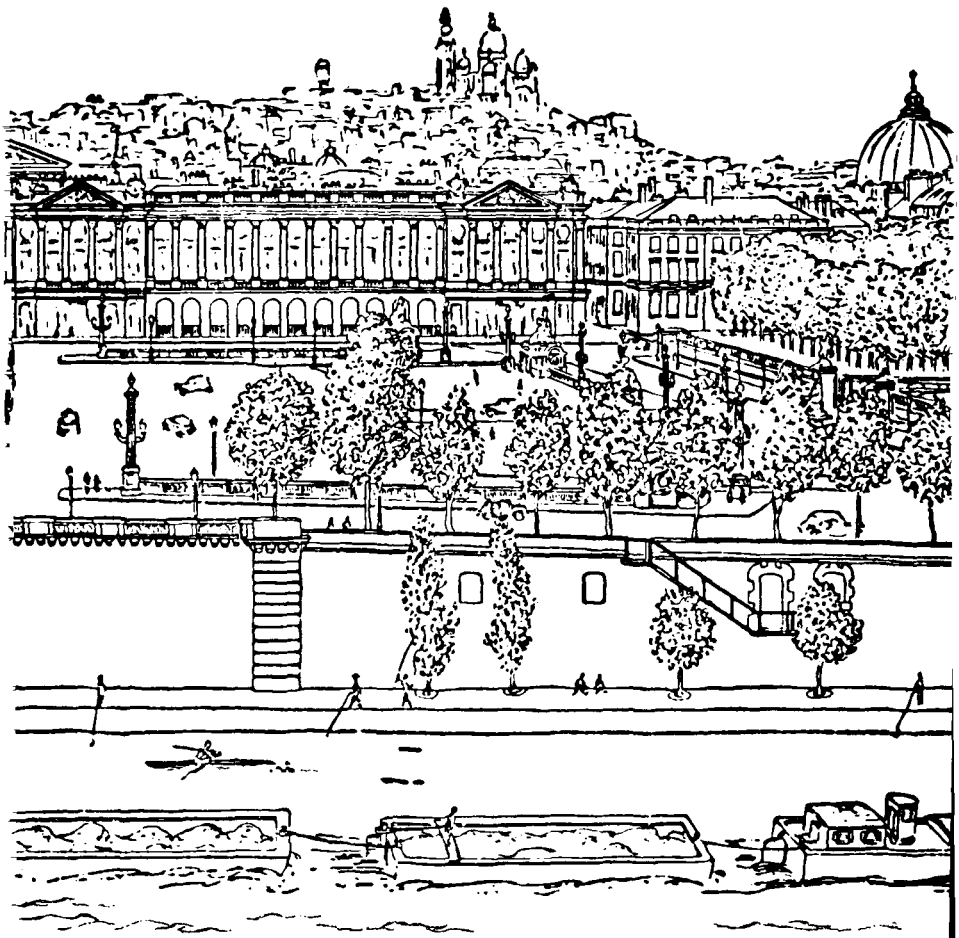

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A Small Cartoon

Barbara Milton

Mordecai Maccabee was in Disney World recording sound and Geraldine La Cru was in her apartment drinking tea. She sat at a table and kept her eyes on the river. A red tug-boat with a black chimney chugged upstream. Geraldine was thinking how she could leave Mordecai and Mordecai was shaking hands with a six-foot Mickey Mouse.

When he wasn't on location, Mordecai lived in Fantasy Land which was located somewhere between Central Park West and Amsterdam. He lived there with a calender picture of Marilyn Monroe, a legend of Beardsley nymphets, and just the face of Botticelli's Venus. He lived there with his own wax sculptures of monster men with dice for teeth and horns in their head. A stone angel hung above the mantelpiece, and Elsie the cow, with four T.V. tube udders, stood on top of it. A concrete chicken grazed along the maroon tiles in front of the fireplace and a rubber King Kong hung by his fingers from the branch of an avocado plant. Mordecai did not live inside of Fantasy Land with Geraldine. Geraldine lived alone.

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However: tucked away in the back of a drawer in her apartment were the keys to Mordecai's. There were four in all: one to the front door of the building; two to his own studio; and one for the burgler alarm. Geraldine did not have the key to his filing cabinet, nor the combination to his safe. It had occurred to her recently that there was information there that he did not want her to see. She also did not have the key to his mailbox.

Last time he went away, he did leave her the mailbox key. He was away for three weeks and she went down every Saturday to water his plants and remove the mail from his box. She missed him and it felt good to be in his house. Each time she went, she examined the penmanship on the envelopes, looked around the room for changes, and listened to the messages on the answering machine. He had had the machine for so long that people had grown used to it and spoke to it the same way that they would speak to him. Besides, he had a very nice tone, there was a swing and a dip to it, a rhythm which softened the shock of a mechanical voice. While Mordecai was away that time, four women's voices were recorded on the machine. Geraldine listened closely to all four.

The first voice belonged to his mother. He had neglected to tell her how long he would be gone and she was worried about him and waiting to hear from him.

The second voice belonged to Christina. She was the girlfriend of a friend of his. Her voice was pouty and she wanted to know why she hadn't heard from him and whether or not he was coming to dinner. She was young and blond and wanted to be a movie star. She had a strong, pretty face and a penchant for tantrums. Christina liked Mordecai because he was sensitive and she wanted him to take pictures for her portfolio. She worked in a flower shop and sent him exotic combinations of purple irises and red roses. Mordecai kept them around long after they had died.

The third voice was Sandy's. She was the wife of a producer. Mordecai spent many hours at the producer's home

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snorting cocaine and planning future projects. Sandy took quaaludes and made vegetable purées with her new Cuisanart. After dinner she would cuddle with the producer. If he was busy, she would cuddle with Mordecai. "When are you coming to see us?" said Sandy's voice over the answering machine.

The last of the female voices belonged to Rosa. It was bold and down to business. "Hi Mordecai. This is Rosa. I want to talk to you. Call me." Rosa was married and had two kids. Of all of Mordy's friends, Geraldine was most drawn to and least trusting of Rosa. Rosa took lovers.

When Mordecai was home, he didn't like Geraldine to listen to his answering machine. He seldom played it back when she was in the room. He also didn't like the way she glanced over his letters or at the open pages of his appointment book. He kept the door open when he went to the bathroom so he could watch what she was doing. "Hey!" he said, when he caught her looking at something.

Geraldine couldn't help it. Not only was she a compulsive reader, but she wanted to know what was happening. "So what's happening?" she would ask him. "Oh, nothing," he would say. "I'm working." He was always working. Everytime he went to the producer's house to snort coke or Christina's house to take pictures or to some party to play a soundtrack he had made, he was working. He never had time to talk to Geraldine. And that's why Geraldine had to look at pictures and video tapes, read letters and appointment books, and listen to the answering machine when he was out of town.

Geraldine pushed her chair back from the table and went into the bathroom to wash her hair.

Mordecai rode through the Tunnel of Love with Julie on his lap. Julie was seven. She had won a trip to Disney World in a "Letter to our new President" contest. Mordecai was part of the crew filming the contestants.

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"Are you in love with me yet?" asked Julie.

"Yes," said Mordecai, stroking her nose with his finger.

"Who do you love better, me or her?" Julie pointed to another little girl two seats ahead of them.

"You," said Mordecai.

As the boat came out of the tunnel into the sunlight, Julie said to Mordecai, "What do you want to do now?"

"If I could do anything, I'd go over there to that Wild West Saloon and buy us some drinks. Then we could get a table and sit down and talk."

"Why don't we?"

"Because we're working."

Geraldine watched the sun run up the river between chunks of ice. She thought about her last night with Mordecai. They had gone to Rosa's house for Rosa's birthday party. Mordecai had spent the whole evening sitting across the kitchen counter from Rosa. Geraldine felt like she wasn't there with Mordecai at all. She felt as if she was an extra friend of Rosa's or of Rosa's friend Tamara. Once she went into the kitchen and stood next to him, but he didn't even look at her. He continued to look at and talk to Rosa who continued to look at and talk to him. Geraldine went back into the living room and sat at the angle to the mirror which best reflected Mordecai's back.

Mordecai was in Disney World for five days. Before he left he watered his plants well. He patted the leaves softly with the palms of his hands. He re-hung King Kong from a stronger branch and put the white-gloved hand of his china Mickey Mouse under a drooping stem. The last thing he did before leaving for Florida was to turn on his answering machine. "Hi, This is Mordecai Maccabee."

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The sun went down. Geraldine closed the shutters against the cold. She sat staring at a small plaque Mordecai had carved and painted for her two years ago when he was still in love. There was a picture on it of a yellow path winding its way through a cobbled archway to a land of purple mountains and white puffy clouds. There was a girl on the path waving, but you couldn't tell whether she was coming or going.

Over the years, Geraldine had felt the archway growing smaller and smaller and herself bigger and bigger on the wrong side of the wall. And somewhere, on the other side, was Mordecai with all his friends and the mountains. The more Geraldine wanted to be with him, the smaller the archway became and the greater the impossibility of getting through. Sometimes she charged toward the archway and sometimes she snuck up real close and got down on her knees and pressed her eye against the little hole. Sometimes it felt good just to lean against the wall.

Mordecai took Julie to the Dance of the Lonely Spaceships. The dance floor was crowded and they were pressed back against the wall.

"I can't see!" cried Julie.

"You come up here with me," said Mordecai and he picked her up and held her so that her face was next to his. Her eyes grew wide as flying saucers and her tongue orbited the ellipse of her mouth.

"I feel the music in my body," she said.

Geraldine thought about Rosa. Rosa was a soothsayer. She told Geraldine that family wasn't in her cards.

"But I want a family!" Geraldine insisted.

"Then what are you doing with Mordecai?

Every couple of weeks Geraldine asked Mordecai to marry

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her.

"Marry you!" he continually said. "I can't even talk to you."

"Who can you talk to?"

"I can't talk to anybody."

But it didn't seem that way to Geraldine. It sure seemed to her like he could talk to Rosa.

The morning after Rosa's birthday party Geraldine rose early and dressed quickly.

"I'm getting out of here," she said.

Mordecai watched her leave without a word. The next day he went to Disney World and Geraldine said to herself, "I never want to see him again."

One Saturday night later she sat in her apartment thinking, "I still have his keys."

The telephone rang once in Mordecai's apartment.

After Julie and the other children went to bed, Mordecai went out for a beer with the rest of the crew.

"I think we're going to leave at ten tomorrow," said the script girl. "We've shot everything we need."

"Shoot!" said Mordecai. "I thought we weren't leaving till one. I still have to get my Mickey Mouse Ears."

"You can get them at the airport."

"I guess I can."

"Mordecai?" said the script girl.

"What?"

"Let's go to bed."

"Still, I have his keys," Geraldine thought right before she fell asleep.

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At eight o'clock on Sunday morning, Geraldine turned the burgler alarm switch to off and opened the door of Mordecai's studio apartment. Sun filtered through the shutters casting dots and dashes of light across the gray walls. Geraldine's eyes scanned the room. On top of the book case an ugly little man with horns reached through a hole in a cardboard wall to a miniature apartment next door. Sitting on a piece of driftwood, on top of Mordecai's bureau, was a saddened ex-con, his elbows on his knees, his thumbs caught forever in the midst of a twirl. The cheeky smile of a pale yellow sun hung over the door to the kitchen. Mordecai had painted a pair of plastic sunglasses the same pale yellow and attached them to the ear-like rays. Next to the window, the icy stare of a hostile nun fell on the warm brown breasts of a Polynesian princess. In the middle of the brown bedspread, sat Mordecai's red baseball cap.

Sunday morning at nine o'clock the six winners of "The Letter to our new President" contest lined up in front of Goofy for one last picture. Then Mordecai walked Julie to Gate 36 and kissed her good-bye.

"Why don't you meet my Daddy?" Julie said.

"Maybe I will," said Mordecai.

"I love you."

"I love you too."

The script girl waited until Julie disappeared and then went up to Mordecai and crowned him with a pair of Mickey Mouse ears.

Geraldine flipped the rewind on the answering machine. When the tape reached the beginning, she pressed the replay button. She sat down on the bed and listened to the messages. There was only one woman's voice and that belonged to his mother. After the last man's voice, there was a long pause and then the messages started up again. They were old

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messages from before Mordecai left for Florida. A woman's voice told him what time to be at the airport and another woman's voice, sounding sad and loving, said "see you later" without leaving a name. It was her own voice. Geraldine smiled and fell backward on the bed.

When she got up ten minutes later she looked around the room for any traces she had left. Nothing. She was safe. She would start all over now and make him love her again. She was determined to quit snooping around. She would give him plenty of room and let him keep all of his secrets. She would stay quietly in the next room at parties and let him talk in peace to whomever he wanted to talk to. She wouldn't press him so closely or ask so many questions.

Geraldine shut the door without a glance at his letter basket. As she turned the switch on the burgler alarm she heard the phone ring and the answering machine pick up the call. She hurried down the stairs in order to resist listening to the voice on the other end of the phone.

Mordecai opened the door to his apartment. He always had the feeling, after being away for a while, that something had happened while he was gone. He did not even step into the room until he looked all around and found everything in the same place. As always, he was relieved, and dropped off his suitcase and went back down to help the script girl who was lugging her own bags up the steps.

After several kisses, the two went around the corner for something to eat. When they came back, she undressed him.

"Fantasy Time," she sang, pushing him down on the bed.

At ten o'clock that night Geraldine could stand it no longer. "He must be home," she thought. "If not, I'll leave a message on his answering machine."

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At ten-o-one, the phone rang once in Mordecai's apartment. Mordecai leaned over the script girl and turned off the sound. He didn't want to think about who might be on the other end. He had an extraordinary ability to concentrate, but he was easily distracted. In order to do one thing, he had to cut himself off completely from anything else. He had to protect himself from interruptions with care and answering machines. He tried to keep friends and family and Geraldine all separate so as to be able to concentrate on one thing at a time. Too much input and he overloaded. Clear and Simple. That's the way he liked to keep things. Clear, simple and separate.

"Hi, Mordecai. This is Geraldine. Are you there? I'll give you a couple of seconds to answer. La la lala la la la lala la lala," she sang. "Don't go breaking my hearrrrrt." Geraldine had studied voice with Dionne Warwick on Warner Bros. Record Albums, but Mordecai was the only one who had ever really listened to her sing. Lately, however, he too turned on the radio whenever she started a song. She often took advantage of the uncritical ears of his answering machine. Click.

Mordecai lay on his side watching the script girl sleep. Women were so beautiful when they slept. They all turned into little girls, like Julie. He used to whisper to Geraldine while she was sleeping: Geraldine. Geraldine. Mordecai loves you, Geraldine. Her face relaxed into smoothness. Her lips fell open. She snored a little bit. She usually fell asleep before he did because she woke up earlier. But when she spent the night with him, he would get into bed with her and wait until she fell asleep. Then he would get up and put on his earphones and watch the Joe Franklin show until two-thirty in the morning. That's what he felt like doing right now, but the script girl might think he was crazy. Women found it dif-

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ficult to get involved with a man with earphones.

Geraldine sat up in bed, thinking. She was wondering how she was going to get through to Mordecai and Mordecai was sitting at his drawing table drawing monster men and naked ladies and listening to the Joe Franklin Show with his earphones on.

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Octavio Paz

In The Middle Of This Phrase . . .

I am not at the crest of the world.
The moment
is not the stylite's pillar,
time
doesn't rise from my feet,
doesn't burst
in my skull in a silent black explosion,
illumination the same as blindness.
I am on the sixth floor,
I am
in a cage hung from time.

Sixth floor:
clatter and surf,
battle of metals,
glasshatter,
engines with a rage now human.
The night
is a disjointed murmur,
a body
self-embraced, tearing itself apart.

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Blind,
fumbling to bind its pieces,
it gathers
its broken names and scatters them.
With lopped fingers
the city touches itself in dreams.

I am not at the crossroads:
to choose
is to go wrong.
I am
in the middle of this phrase.
Where will it take me?
Rumbling tumble,
data and date,
my birthfall:
calendar dismembered
in the hollows of my memory.
I am the sack of my shadows.

Descent
to the slack breasts of my mother.
Wrinkled hills,
swabbed lava,
sobbing fields,
saltpeter meals.
Two workmen open the pit.
Crumbled
mouth of cement and brick.
The wracked box appears:
through the loose planks
the pearl-grey hat,
the pair of shoes,
the black suit of a lawyer.
Bones, buttons, rags:
sudden heap of dust
at the feet of the light.

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Cold, *unused light,*
almost sleeping,
dawn light,
just down from the hills,
shepherdess of the dead.
That which was my father
fits in that canvas sack
a workman hands me
as my mother crosses herself.
Before it ends
the vision scatters:
I am in the middle,
hung in a cage,
hung in an image.
The beginning drifts off,
the end vanishes.

There is neither start nor finish:
I am in the pause,
I neither end nor begin,
what I say
has neither hands nor feet.
I turn around in myself
and always find
the same names,
the same faces,
and never find myself.
My history is not mine:
a syllable from that broken phrase
the city in its circular fever
repeats and repeats.

City, my city,
insulted stela,
dishonored stone,
name spat out.
Your story is History:

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fate
masked as freedom,
errant,
orbitless star,
a game
we all play without knowing the rules,
a game that no one wins,
a game without rules,
the whim of a speculative god,
a man
turned into a stuttering god.
Our oracles
are aphasic speech.
Our prophets
seers with glasses.
History:
coming and going
without beginning
without end.

No one has gone there,
no one
has drunk from the fountain,
no one
has opened the stone eyelids of time,
no one
has heard the first word,
no one will hear the last,
the mouth that speaks it talks to itself,
no one
has gone down in the pit of the universes,
no one
has returned from the dungheap of the suns.

History:
dump and rainbow.

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Scale
to the high terraces:
seven notes
dissolved in clarity.
Shadowless words.
We didn't hear them, we denied them,
We said they don't exist:
we were content with noise.
Sixth floor:
I am in the middle of this phrase:
where
will it take me?
Mangled language.
Poet: gardener of epitaphs.

Translated from the Spanish
by Eliot Weinberger

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Portfolio

Burning Issues

Allen Ruppersberg

Warsaw, Indiana
Forest Lake, Minnesota
Longview, Texas
Wyoming, Michigan
Kirksville, Missouri
Barberton, Ohio
Wales, Wisconsin
Glasgow, Kentucky

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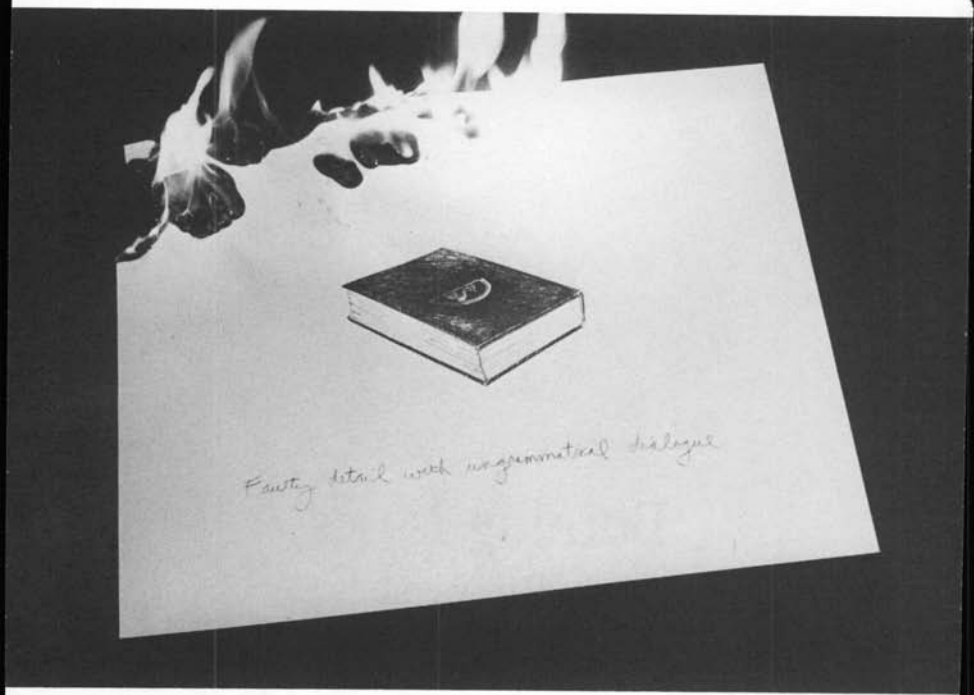

FAULTY DETAIL WITH UNGRAMMATICAL DIALOGUE

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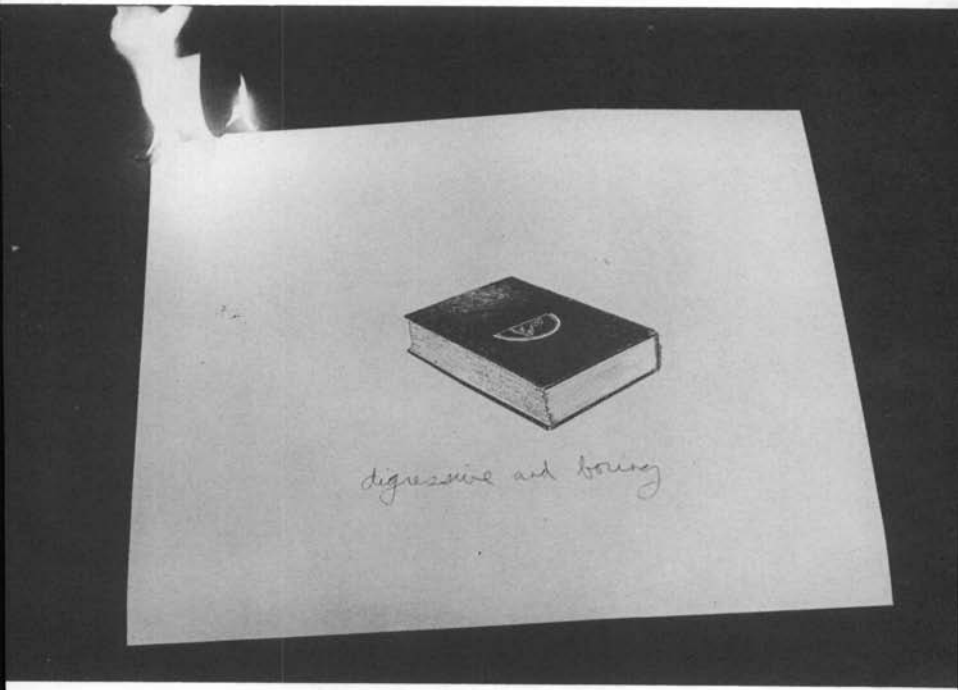

DIGRESSIVE AND BORING

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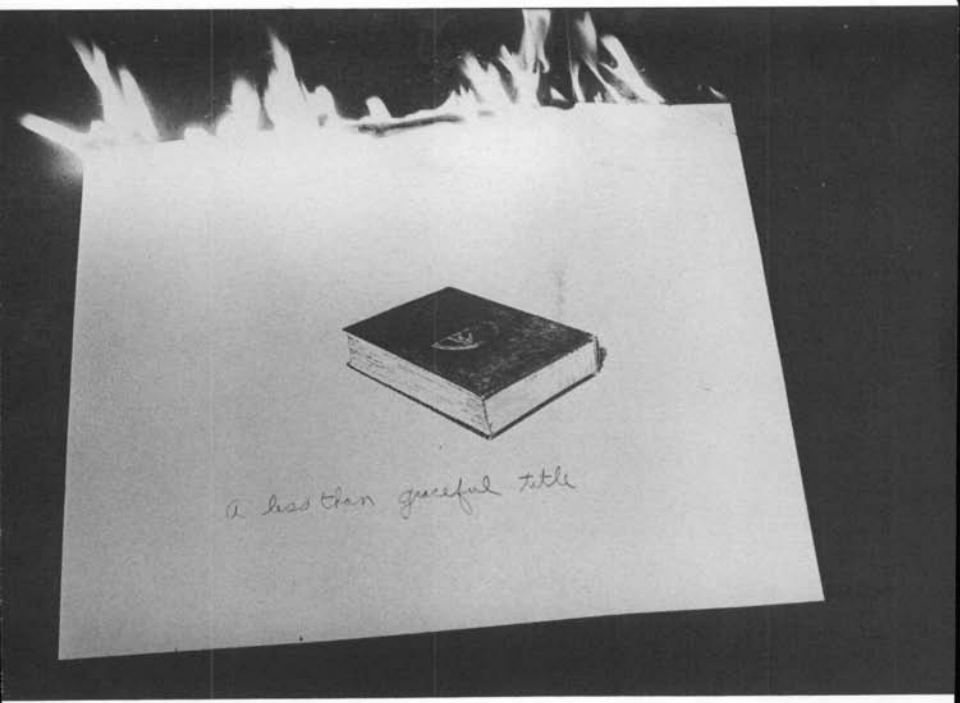

A LESS THAN GRACEFUL TITLE

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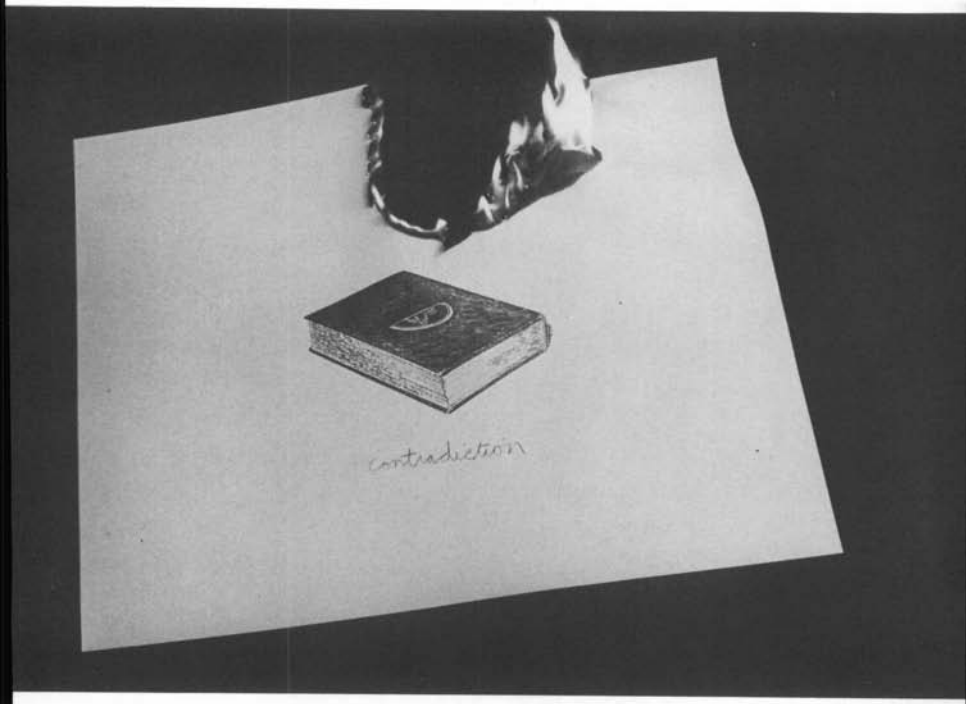

CONTRADICTION

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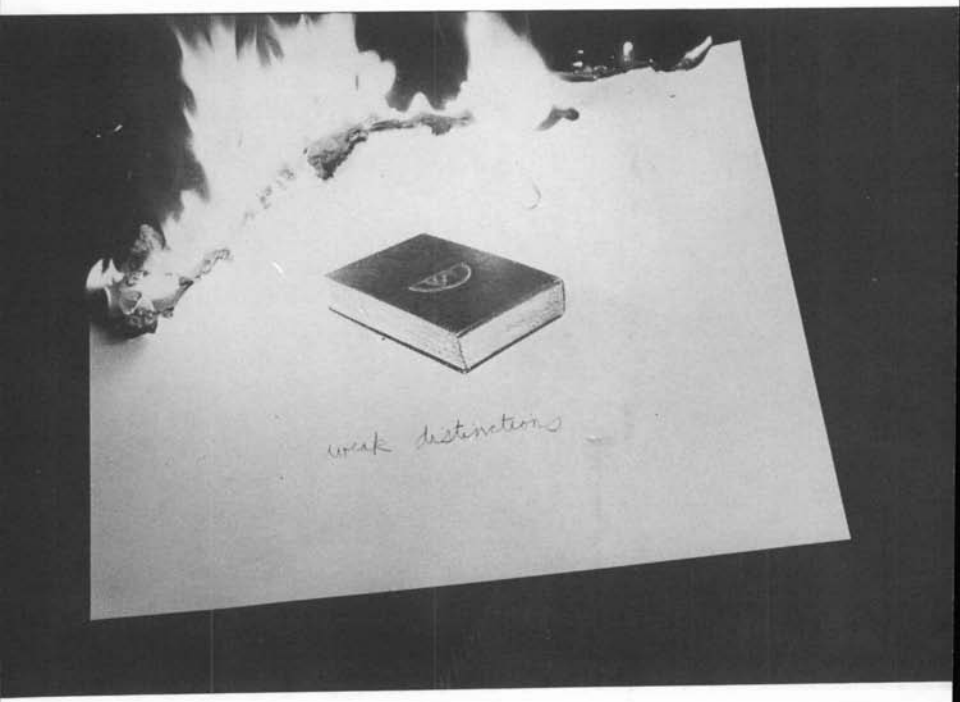

WEAK DISTINCTIONS

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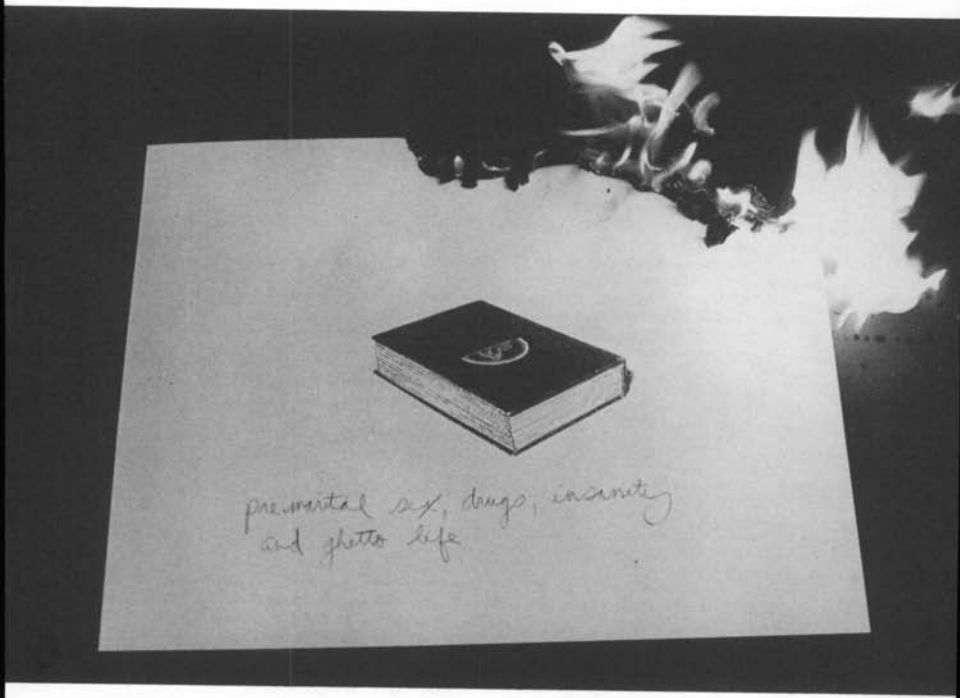

PREMARITAL SEX, DRUGS,
INSANITY AND GHETTO LIFE

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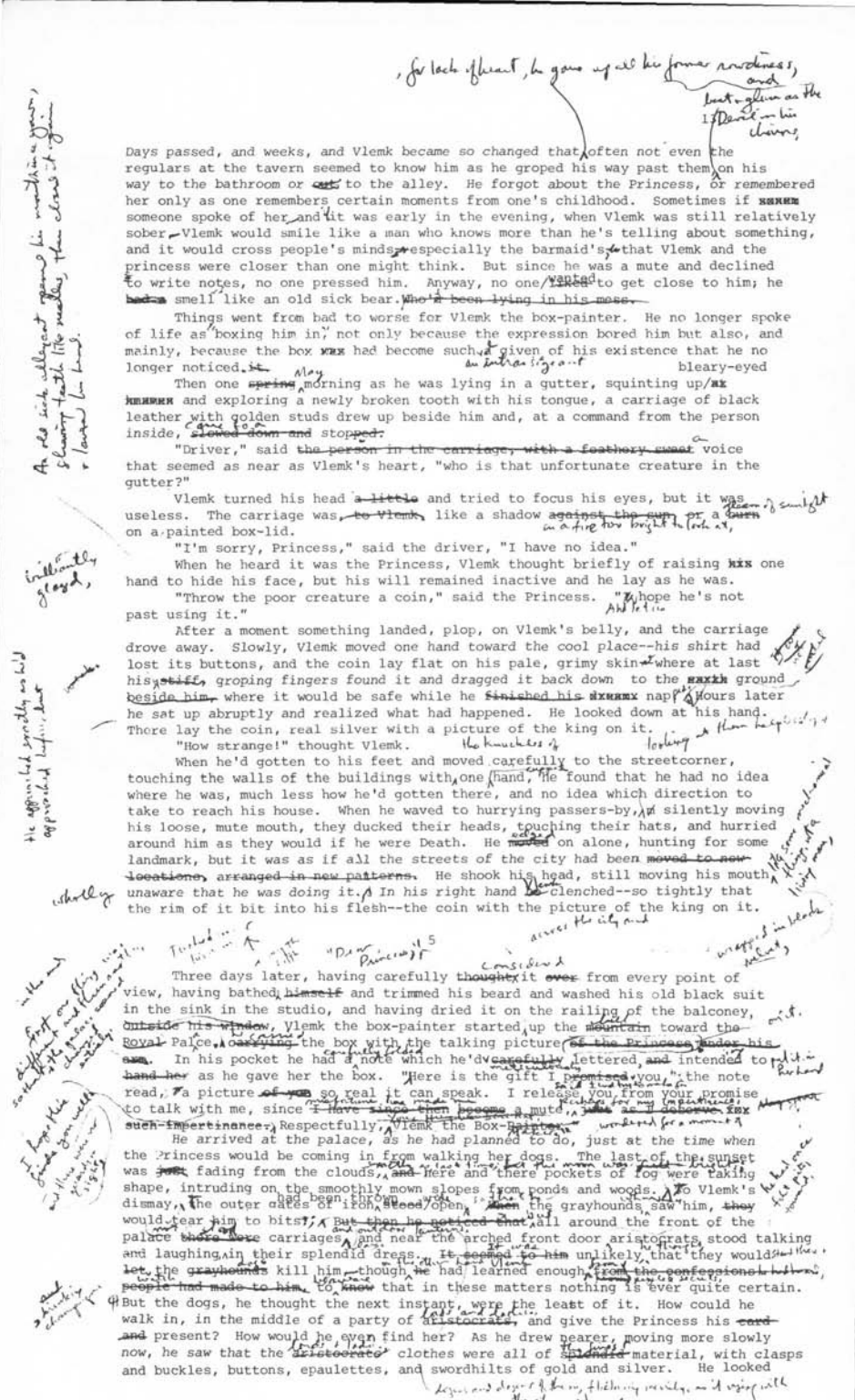

Days passed, and weeks, and Vlemk became so changed that often not even the regulars at the tavern seemed to know him as he groped his way past them on his way to the bathroom or out to the alley. He forgot about the Princess, or remembered her only as one remembers certain moments from one's childhood. Sometimes if someone spoke of her and it was early in the evening, when Vlemk was still relatively sober, Vlemk would smile like a man who knows more than he's telling about something, and it would cross people's minds, especially the barmaid's, that Vlemk and the princess were closer than one might think. But since he was a mute and declined to write notes, no one pressed him. Anyway, no one wanted to get close to him; he smell like an old sick bear.

Things went from bad to worse for Vlemk the box-painter. He no longer spoke of life as boxing him in, not only because the expression bored him but also, and mainly, because the box had become such a given of his existence that he no longer noticed.

Then one morning as he was lying in a gutter, squinting up/ and exploring a newly broken tooth with his tongue, a carriage of black leather with golden studs drew up beside him and, at a command from the person inside, stopped.

"Driver," said voice that seemed as near as Vlemk's heart, "who is that unfortunate creature in the gutter?"

Vlemk turned his head and tried to focus his eyes, but it was useless. The carriage was, like a shadow on a painted box-lid.

"I'm sorry, Princess," said the driver, "I have no idea."

When he heard it was the Princess, Vlemk thought briefly of raising one hand to hide his face, but his will remained inactive and he lay as he was.

"Throw the poor creature a coin," said the Princess. "I hope he's not past using it."

After a moment something landed, plop, on Vlemk's belly, and the carriage drove away. Slowly, Vlemk moved one hand toward the cool place--his shirt had lost its buttons, and the coin lay flat on his pale, grimy skin--where at last his groping fingers found it and dragged it back down to the ground beside him, where it would be safe while he hours later he sat up abruptly and realized what had happened. He looked down at his hand. There lay the coin, real silver with a picture of the king on it.

"How strange!" thought Vlemk.

When he'd gotten to his feet and moved carefully to the streetcorner, touching the walls of the buildings with one hand, he found that he had no idea where he was, much less how he'd gotten there, and no idea which direction to take to reach his house. When he waved to hurrying passers-by, silently moving his loose, mute mouth, they ducked their heads, touching their hats, and hurried around him as they would if he were Death. He on alone, hunting for some landmark, but it was as if all the streets of the city had been

Three days later, having carefully it from every point of view, having bathed and trimmed his beard and washed his old black suit in the sink in the studio, and having dried it on the railing of the balconey, Vlemk the box-painter started up the toward the Royal Palace, carrying the box with the talking picture of the Princess under his arm. In his pocket he had a note which he'd carefully lettered, and intended to hand her as he gave her the box. "Here is the gift I promised you," the note read, "a picture of you so real it can speak. I release you from your promise to talk with me, since I Have since then become a mute, as I deserve, for such impertinance." Respectfully, Vlemk the Box-Painter

He arrived at the palace, as he had planned to do, just at the time when the Princess would be coming in from walking her dogs. The last of the sunset was fading from the clouds, and here and there pockets of fog were taking shape, intruding on the smoothly mown slopes from ponds and woods. To Vlemk's dismay, the outer gates of iron stood open, and when the greyhounds saw him, they would tear him to bits! But then he noticed that all around the front of the palace there were carriages, and near the arched front door aristocrats stood talking and laughing in their splendid dress. It seemed to him unlikely that they would let the greyhounds kill him--though he had learned enough from the confessions people had made to him, to know that in these matters nothing is ever quite certain. But the dogs, he thought the next instant, were the least of it. How could he walk in, in the middle of a party of aristocrats, and give the Princess his card and present? How would he even find her? As he drew nearer, moving more slowly now, he saw that the aristocrats' clothes were all of material, with clasps and buckles, buttons, epaulettes, and swordhilts of gold and silver. He looked

A John Gardner manuscript page.

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Nancy Crampton

John Gardner
The Art of Fiction LXXIII

*The following interview incorporates three done with John Gardner over the past decade. In his introduction (1971) Frank McConnell wrote of the thirty-nine-year-old author as one of the most original and promising younger American novelists. His four novels—*The Resurrection *(1966),* The Wreck of Agathon *(1970),* Grendel *(1971) and* The Sunlight Dialogues *(1972)—represent, in the eyes of many critics and reviewers, a new and exhilarating phase in the enterprise of modern writing, a consolidation of the resources of the contemporary novel and a leap forward—or backward—into a reestablished humanism. One finds in his books elements*

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of the three major strains of current fiction: the elegant narrative gamesmanship of Barth or Pynchon, the hyperrealistic Gothicism of Joyce Carol Oates and Stanley Elkin, and the cultural, intellectual history of Saul Bellow. Like so many characters in current fiction, Gardner's are men on the fringe, men shocked into the consciousness that they are living lives which seem to be determined, not by their own will, but by massive myths, cosmic fictions over which they have no control (e.g. Ebeneezer Cooke in Barth's Sot-Weed Factor, *Tyrone Slothrop in Pynchon's* Gravity's Rainbow); *but Gardner's characters are philosophers on the fringe, heirs, all of them, to the great debates over authenticity and bad faith which characterize our era. In* Grendel, *for example, the hero-monster is initiated into the Sartrean vision of Nothingness by an ancient, obviously well-read Dragon: a myth speaking of the emptiness of all myths: 'Theory-makers. . . . They'd map out roads through Hell with their crackpot theories, their here-to-the-moon-and-back lists of paltry facts. Insanity—the simplest insanity ever devised!' His heroes—like all men—are philosophers who are going to die; and their characteristic discovery—the central creative energy of Gardner's fiction—is that the death of consciousness finally justifies consciousness itself. The myths, whose artificiality contemporary writers have been at such pains to point out, become in Gardner's work real and life-giving once again, without ever losing their modern character of fictiveness.*

"Gardner may well represent, then, the new 'conservatism' which some observers have noted in the current scene. But it is a conservatism of high originality, and, at least in Gardner's case, of deep authority in his life. A Ph.D. in Medieval Literature (University of Iowa), Gardner has taught academic courses throughout his novelistic career, and published, besides his fictions, two widely respected annotated translations of medieval poetry and a healthy (i.e. tenure-making) number of scholarly articles. When he recently guest-taught a course in 'Narrative Forms' at Northwestern University, a

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number of his students were surprised to find a modern writer —and a hot property—enthusiastic, not only about Homer, Virgil, Appolonius Rhodius, and Dante, but deeply concerned with the critical controversies surrounding those writers, and with mistakes in their English translations. As the interview following makes clear, Gardner's job in and affection for ancient writing and the tradition of metaphysics is, if anything, greater than for the explosions and involutions of modern fiction. He is, in the full sense of the word, a literary *man.*

" 'It's as if God put me on earth to write,' Gardner observed once. And writing, or thinking about writing takes up much of his day. He works, he says, usually on three or four books at the same time, allowing the plots to cross-pollinate, shape and qualify each other. And, at this writing, he has three more books ready for publication: Jason and Medeia, *an epic poem,* Nickel Mountain, *a novel, and* King's Indian, *a collection of tales."*

Sara Matthiessen describes Gardner in the spring of 1978 (additional works published by then included those mentioned above and October Light, *a novel; his treatise* On Moral Fiction *was about to be published). Matthiessen arrived with a friend to interview him at the Breadloaf Writer's Colony in Vermont: "After we'd knocked a couple of times, he opened the door looking haggard and just-wakened. Dressed in a purple sateen, bell-sleeved, turtle-neck shirt and jeans, he was an exotic figure: unnaturally white hair to below his shoulders, of medium height, he seemed an incarnation from the medieval era central to his study. 'Come in!' he said, as though there were no two people he'd rather have seen than Sally and me, and he led us into a cold, bright room sparsely equipped with wooden furniture. We were offered extra socks against the chill. John lit his pipe, and we sat down to talk."*

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INTERVIEWER

You've worked in several different areas: prose, fiction, verse, criticism, book reviews, scholarly books, children's books, radio plays; you wrote the libretto for a recently produced opera. Could you discuss the different genres? Which one have you most enjoyed doing?

GARDNER

The one that feels the most important is the novel. You create a whole world in a novel and you deal with values in a way that you can't possibly in a short story. The trouble is that since novels represent a whole world, you can't write them all the time. After you finish a novel, it takes a couple of years to get in enough life and enough thinking about things to have anything to say, any clear questions to work through. You have to keep busy, so it's fun to do the other things. I do book reviews when I'm hard up for money, which I am all the time. They don't pay much, but they keep you going. Book reviews are interesting because it's necessary to keep an eye on what's good and what's bad in the books of a society worked so heavily by advertising, public relations and so on. Writing reviews isn't really analytical, it's for the most part quick reactions—joys and rages. I certainly never write a review about a book I don't think worth reviewing, a flat-out bad book, unless it's an enormously fashionable bad book. As for writing children's books, I've done them because when my kids were growing up I would now and then write them a story as a Christmas present, and then after I became sort of successful, people saw the stories and said they should be published. I like them, of course. I wouldn't give junk to my kids. I've also done scholarly books and articles. The reason I've done those is that I've been teaching things like Beowulf and Chaucer for a long time. As you teach a poem year after year, you realize, or anyway convince yourself, that you understand the poem and that most people have got it slightly wrong. That's natural with any poem, but during the years I taught lit courses, it was especially true of medieval and clas-

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sical poetry. When the general critical view has a major poem or poet *badly* wrong, you feel like you ought to straighten it out. The studies of Chaucer since the 50's is very strange stuff: like the theory that Chaucer is a frosty Oxford-donnish guy shunning carnality and cupidity. Not true. So close analysis is useful. But writing novels—and maybe opera libretti—is the kind of writing that gives me greatest satisfaction; the rest is more like entertainment.

INTERVIEWER

You have been called a "philosophical novelist." What do you think of the label?

GARDNER

I'm not sure that being a philosophical novelist is better than being some other kind, but I guess that there's not much doubt that, in a way at least, that's what I am. A writer's material is what he cares about, and I like philosophy the way some people like politics, or football games, or unidentified flying objects. I read a man like Collingwood, or even Brand Blanchard or C.D. Broad, and I get excited—even anxious—filled with suspense. I read a man like Swinburn on Time and Space and it becomes a matter of deep concern to me whether the structure of space changes near large masses. It's as if I actually think philosophy will solve life's great questions—which sometimes, come to think of it, it does, at least for me. Probably not often, but I like the illusion. Blanchard's attempt at a logical demonstration that there really *is* a universal human morality, or the recent flurry of theories by various majestical cranks that the universe is stabilizing itself instead of flying apart—those are lovely things to run into. Interesting and arresting, I mean, like talking frogs. I get a good deal more out of the philosophy section of a college bookstore than out of the fiction section, and I more often read philosophical books than I read novels. So sure, I'm "philosophical," though what I write is by no means straight philosophy. I make up stories. Meaning creeps in of

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necessity, to keep things clear, like paragraph breaks and punctuation. And, I might add, my friends are all artists and critics, not philosophers. Philosophers—except for the few who are my friends—drink beer and watch football games and defeat their wives and children by the fraudulent tyranny of logic.

INTERVIEWER

But insofar as you *are* a "philosophical novelist," what is it that you do?

GARDNER

I write novels, books about people, and what I write is philosophical only in a limited way. The human dramas that interest me—stir me to excitement, and loosely, vision—are always rooted in serious philosophical questions. That is, I'm bored by plots that depend on the psychological or sociological quirks of the main characters—mere melodramas of healthy against sick—stories which, subtly or otherwise, merely preach. Art as the wisdom of Marcus Welby, M.D. Granted, most of fiction's great heroes are at least slightly crazy, from Achilles to Captain Ahab, but the problems that make great heroes act are the problems no sane man could have gotten around either. Achilles, in his nobler, saner moments, lays down the whole moral code of *The Iliad.* But the violence and anger triggered by war, the human passions that overwhelm Achilles' reason and make him the greatest criminal in all fiction—they're just as much a problem for lesser, more ordinary people. The same with Ahab's desire to pierce the Mask, smash through to absolute knowledge. Ahab's crazy, so he actually tries it; but the same Mask leers at all of us. So, when I write a piece of fiction I select my characters and settings and so on because they have a bearing, at least to me, on the old unanswerable philosophical questions. And as I spin out the action, I'm always very concerned with springing discoveries—actual philosophical discoveries. But at the same time I'm concerned —and finally *more* concerned—with what the discoveries do

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to the character who makes them, and to the people around him. It's that that makes me not really a philosopher, but a novelist.

INTERVIEWER

The novel, *Grendel,* is a retelling of the Beowulf story from the monster's point of view. Why does an American writer living in the twentieth century abandon the realistic approach and borrow such legendary material as the basis for a novel?

GARDNER

I've never been terribly fond of realism because of certain things that realism seems to commit me to. With realism you have to spend two hundred pages proving that somebody lives in Detroit so that something can happen and be absolutely convincing. But the value systems of the people involved is the important thing, not the fact that they live on Nine Mile Road. In my earlier fiction I went as far as I could from realism because the easy way to get to the heart of what you want to say is to take somebody else's story, particularly a non-realistic story. When you tell the story of Grendel, or Jason and Medeia, you've got to end it the way the story ends —traditionally, but you can get to do it in your own way. The result is that the writer comes to understand things about the modern world in light of the history of human consciousness; he understands it a little more deeply, and has a lot more fun writing it.

INTERVIEWER

But why specifically *Beowulf?*

GARDNER

Some stories are more interesting than others. *Beowulf* is a terribly interesting story. It gives you some really wonderful visual images, such as the dragon. It's got Swedes looking over the hills and scaring everybody. It's got mead halls. It's got Grendel, and Grendel's mother. I really do believe that a

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novel has to be a feast of the senses, a delightful thing. One of the better things that has happened to the novel in recent years is that it has become rich. Think of a book like *Chimera* or *The Sot-Weed Factor*—they may not be very good books, but they are at least rich experiences. For me, writers like John O'Hara are interesting only in the way that movies and T.V. plays are interesting; there is almost nothing in a John O'Hara novel that couldn't be in the movies just as easily. On the other hand, there is no way an animator, or anyone else, can create an image from *Grendel* as exciting as the image in the reader's mind: Grendel is a monster, and living in the first person because we're all in some sense monsters, trapped in our own language and habits of emotion. Grendel expresses feelings we all feel—enormous hostility, frustration, disbelief, and so on, so that the reader, projecting his own monster, projects a monster which is, for him, the perfect horror show. There is no way you can do that in television or the movies where you are always seeing the kind of realistic novel O'Hara wrote . . . Gregory Peck walking down the street. It's just the same old thing to me. There are other things that are interesting in O'Hara, and I don't mean to put him down excessively, but I go for another kind of fiction: I want the effect that a radio play gives you or that novels are always giving you at their best.

INTERVIEWER

You do something very interesting in *Grendel*. You never name Beowulf, and in the concluding scene you describe him in such a way as to give the impression that Grendel is really confronting, not Beowulf or another human being, but the dragon. That seems a significant change from the poem.

GARDNER

I didn't mean it to be a change. As a medievalist, one knows there are two great dragons in medieval art. There's Christ the dragon, and there's Satan the dragon. There's always a war between those two great dragons. In modern

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Christian symbolism a sweeter image of Jesus with the sheep in his arms has evolved, but I like the old image of the warring dragon. That's not to say Beowulf really is Christ, but that he's Christ-like. Actually he is many things. When Grendel first sees Beowulf coming, Grendel thinks of him as a sort of machine, and what comes to the reader's mind is a kind of computer, a spaceman, a complete alien, unknown. The inescapable mechanics of the universe. At other times, Beowulf looks like a fish to Grendel. He comes in the season of Pisces when, among other things, you stab yourself in the back. On other occasions, Grendel sees other things, one after another, and for a brief flash, when he is probably hallucinating—he's fighting, losing blood very badly because he has his arm torn off—Grendel thinks he's fighting the dragon instead of Beowulf. At the end of the story, Grendel doesn't know *who* he's fighting. He's just fighting something big and horrible and sure to kill him, something that he could never have predicted in the universe as he understood it, because from the beginning of the novel, Grendel feels himself hopelessly determined, hopelessly struggling against—in the profoundest sense—the way things are. He feels there's no way out, that there's no hope for living consciousness, particularly *his* consciousness since, for reasons inexplicable to him, he's on the wrong side, Cain's side instead of mankind's.

INTERVIEWER

It seems to me that determinism is affliction imposed on him by the *scop*.

GARDNER

It's true, but only partly. In the novel, he's undeniably pushed around by the universe, but also not to believe not to have faith in life. What happens is, in the story, the shaper, the *scop*, the court poet comes to this horrible court that's made itself what it is by killing everybody, beating people, chopping them to death, and the poet looks at this havoc around him and makes up a story about what a wonderful

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court it is, what noble ideals it has. The courtiers are just dumb enough to believe it, just as Americans have believed the stories about Sam Adams and Ethan Allen and all those half-mythical heroes. George Washington once stood for thirty minutes stuttering in a rage before executing a private for a minor misdeed. Sam Adams was like a well-meaning Marxist agitator. Constantly lied. He told Boston that New York had fallen when it hadn't fallen. Or anyway so one of my characters claims. I no longer remember what the truth is.

INTERVIEWER

But that's an important moment in Grendel's development, isn't it, when he hears this story?

GARDNER

He hears the story and is tempted to believe it. And for certain reasons, partly because he is kicked out of the mead hall, he decides to reject the myth. That's Grendel's hard luck, because when he goes to the mead hall and wants to be a good monster and doesn't want to kill people anymore, Hrothgar's warriors don't know that, and they throw spears at him and hurt him.

INTERVIEWER

You don't see yourself, as a novelist, analogous to the *scop* in the telling of a story?

GARDNER

Oh sure. Absolutely. I absolutely believe every artist is in the position of the *scop*. As I tried to make plain in *On Moral Fiction*, I think that the difference right now between good art and bad art is that the good artists are the people who are, in one way or another, creating, out of deep and honest concern, a vision of life-in-the-twentieth-century that is worth pursuing. And the bad artists, of whom there are many, are whining or moaning or staring, because it's fashionable, into the dark abyss. If you believe that life is fundamentally a vol-

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cano full of baby skulls, you've got two main choices as an artist: you can either stare into the volcano and count the skulls for the thousandth time and tell everybody, "There are the skulls; that's your baby, Mrs. Miller." Or you can try to build walls so that fewer baby skulls go in. It seems to me that the artist ought to hunt for positive ways of surviving, of living. You shouldn't lie. If there aren't any, so far as you can see, you should say so, like the *Merdistes*. But I don't think the *Merdistes* are right—except for Céline himself, by accident, because Céline (as character, not as author) is comic; a villain so outrageous—miserable, and inept that we laugh at him and at all he so earnestly stands for. I think the world is not all merde. I think it's possible to make walls around at least some of the smoking holes.

INTERVIEWER

Won't this have the effect of transforming the modern writer into a didactic writer?

GARDNER

Not didactic. The didactic writer is anything but moral because he is always simplifying the argument, always narrowing away, getting rid of legitimate objections. *Mein Kampf* is a moralistic book—a stupid, ugly one. A truly moral book is one which is radically open to persuasion, but looks hard at a problem, and keeps looking for answers. It gives you an absolutely clear vision, as if the poet, the writer, had nothing to do with it, had just done everything in his power to imagine how things are. It's the situation of Dostoevsky and Nietzsche —an illustration I use in *On Moral Fiction*. Neitzsche sets up this abstract theory of the Superman according to which a person can kill or do anything he wants because there is no basis of law except the herd. God doesn't speak; dead. So the people get together and vote to have a red light on Highway 61 where there's no traffic. It's three o'clock in the morning. You're travelling, and there's a red light, and you decide to jump the light. A car pulls out of the weeds, a policeman and

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he comes after you. If you're a superman, you politely and gently kill him, put him back in the weeds, and drive on. The theory of the superman is kind of interesting, abstractly. The question is, is it right? Will it work? Can human beings live with it? So Dostoevsky sets up the experiment imaginatively. Obviously he doesn't want to go out and actually kill somebody to see if it works, so he imagines a perfectly convincing St. Petersburg, and a perfectly convincing person who would do this. (What student in all St. Petersburg would commit a murder? What relatives would he have? What friends? What would his pattern be? What would he eat?) Dostoevsky follows the experiment out and finds out what does happen.

I think all great art does this, and you don't have to do it realistically. Obviously Raskolnikov could have been a giant saurian, as long as his character is consistent and convincing, tuned to what we know about actual feeling. The point is realism of imagination, convincingness of imagination. The novelist pursues questions and pursues them thoroughly. Not only when does it rain and when doesn't it rain, but can we tolerate rain? What can we be made to tolerate? What should we not allow ourselves to be made to tolerate? And so on. So that finally, what's moral in fiction is chiefly its way of looking. The premise of moral art is that life is better than death; art hunts for avenues to life. The book succeeds if we're powerfully persuaded that the focal characters, in their fight for life, have won honestly or, if they lose, are tragic in their loss, not just tiresome or pitiful.

INTERVIEWER

So you have a strong sense of mission or of a goal, in modern fiction.

GARDNER

Yes, I do. In my own way, anyway. I want to push the novel in a new direction, or back to an old one—Homer's or the Beowulf-Poet's. Of course a lot of other writers are trying to do something rather different—Barth and Pynchon, I

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grant them their right—grudgingly. But to paraphrase the Imagists, I want "no ideas but in *energeia*"—Aristotle's made-up word for (excuse the jazz), "the actualization of the potential which exists in character and situation." Philosophy as plot. I think no novel can please for very long without plot as the center of its argument. We get too many books full of meaning by innuendo—the ingenious symbol, the allegorical overlay, stories in which *events* are of only the most trivial importance, just the thread on which the writer strings hints of his "real" meaning. This has been partly a fault of the way we've been studying and teaching literature, of course. Our talk of levels and all that. For instance, take John Updike's *Couples*. It's a fairly good book, it seems to me, but there's a good reason no one reads it anymore: contrived phrases bear all the burden. Symbolically constructed names; descriptions of a living room which slyly hint at the expansion of the universe; or Updike's whole cunning trick with Christian iconography, circles and straight lines—circles traditionally associated with reason, straight lines with faith. You work the whole symbolic structure out and you're impressed by Updike's intelligence—maybe in this book, even wisdom—but you have difficulty telling the fornicators apart. Reading *Couples* is like studying science while watching pornographic movies put together from random scraps on the cutting-room floor.

INTERVIEWER

You want novels to be whole entertainments, then.

GARDNER

Sure! Look: it's impossible for us to read Dostoevsky as a writer of thrillers anymore, because of this whole weight of explanation and analysis we've loaded on the books. And yet *The Brothers Karamazov* is obviously, among other things, a thriller novel. (It also contains, to my mind, some pretentious philosophizing). What I've wanted to do, in *The Sunlight Dialogues*, for example, is write a book—maybe not a novel

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—that you could read as entertainment. Where there's straight philosophizing, here as in *The Resurrection*, it's present because that's what the character would say (or so I thought at the time), present because that's what makes him behave as he does. No meaning but emotion-charged action and emotional reaction.

INTERVIEWER

The classical forms, like *Grendel*, are not your only models, nor do you always adhere to the superficial nature of the form you've chosen—for instance, there are parts in the *Sunlight Dialogues* that parody Faulkner.

GARDNER

Sure. In fact, the whole conception of the book is in a way parodic of Faulkner, among others—the whole idea of family and locale. A lot of times I've consciously taken a writer on. In the first novel I did, I used the title *The Resurrection* to give the reader a clue as to what's wrong with Tolstoy in his *Resurrection*. I don't think many readers notice, and of course it doesn't matter. In fact, a friend of mine who's a very good critic, asked me one time if I were aware that I'd used a title that Tolstoy had used. That's all right. If I sounded too much like Tolstoy then my novel would be a critical footnote.

INTERVIEWER

How about your contemporaries? Has any of their work influenced your writing?

GARDNER

Of course I'm aware of modern writers. . . and some writers have changed my way of thinking. I don't always like what Bill Gass does—though I do immensely like much of his fiction—but I certainly have changed my writing-style because of his emphasis on language, that is, his brilliant use of it in books. It has always seemed to me that the main thing you ought to be doing when you write a story is, as Robert Lewis

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Stevenson said, to set a "dream" going in the reader's mind . . . so that he opens the page, reads about three words, and drops into a sort of trance. He's seeing Russia instead of his living room. Not that he's *passive*. The reader hopes and judges. I used to think that words and style should be transparent, that no word should call attention to itself in any way; that you could say the plainest thing possible to get the dream going. After I read some early Gass—"The Pedersen Kid," I think—I realized that you don't really interfere with the dream by saying things in an interesting way. Performance is an important part of the show. But I don't, like Gass, think language is of value when it's opaque, more decorative than communicative. Gass loves those formalist arguments. He's said, for instance, that it's naive to think of characters as real —that it's absurd to cry for little Nell. It may be absurd to cry at that particular death, because in that case the writing is lousy. But what happens in real fiction is identical to what happens in a dream—as long as we have the right to wake up screaming from a nightmare, we have the right to worry about a character. Gass has a funny theory. But I have borrowed a great many elements from it—I'm sure I owe more to him than to any other living writer. And I have learned a few things from slightly contemporary writers. About symbols, for instance. If you stop with James Joyce, you may write a slightly goofy kind of symbolic novel. Joyce's fondness for the "mannered" is the least of it. At the time Joyce was writing, people were less attuned than they are now to symbolic writing, so he sometimes let himself get away with bald, obvious symbols. Now, thanks largely to the New Criticism, any smart college freshman can catch every symbol that comes rolling along. The trouble is that if a reader starts watching the play of symbolism and missing what's happening to the characters, he gets an intellectual apprehension of the book, and that's pretty awful. He might as well read philosophy or meditations on the wounds of Christ. But you still need resonance, deep effect. You have to build into the novel the movement from particular to general. The question is how do you get a

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symbolic structure without tipping your hand? A number of modern writers have shown ways of doing it. The red herring symbols of Pynchon, the structural distractions of Barth, the machine-gun energy of Gaddis. Above all, Gass's verbal glory.

INTERVIEWER

Do you, like Joyce, play to the reader subliminally through symbolism, or do you make fairly overt statements by demonstrating what certain values can lead to?

GARDNER

I try to be as overt as possible. Plot, character and action first. I try to say everything with absolute directness so that the reader sees the characters moving around, sees the house they're moving through, the landscape, the weather and so on. I try to be absolutely direct about moral values and dilemmas. Read it to the char-woman, Richardson said. I say, make it plain to her dog. But when you write fiction such as mine, fantastic or quasi-realistic fiction, it happens inevitably that as you're going over it, thinking about it, you recognize unconscious symbols bubbling up to the surface, and you begin to revise to give them room, sort of nudge them into sight. Though ideally the reader should never catch you shaking a symbol at him. (Intellect is the chief distractor of the mind.) The process of writing becomes more and more mysterious as you go over the draft more and more times; finally everything is symbolic. Even then you keep pushing it, making sure that it's as coherent and self-contained as a grapefruit. Frequently, when you write a novel you start out feeling pretty clear about your position, what side you're on; as you revise, you find your unconscious pushing up associations that modify that position, force you to reconsider.

INTERVIEWER

You began *October Light*, you've said, with the idea that "the traditional New England values are the values we should live by: good workmanship, independence, unswerving hon-

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esty—"but these proved over-simple. Is the process of fiction always the process of discovery for you? In other words, do you often find that the idea that prompted the fiction turns out to be too simple, or even wrong?

GARDNER

I always start out with a position I later discover to be too simple. That's the nature of things—what physicists call complimentarity. What's interesting is that my ideas prove too simple in ways I could never have anticipated. In everything I've written I've come to the realization that I was missing something, telling myself lies. That's one of the main pleasures of writing. What I do is follow the drama where it goes; the potential of the characters in their given situation. I let them go where they have to go, and analyze as I'm going along what's involved, what the implications are. When I don't like the implications, I think hard about it. Chasing implications to the wall is my one real skill. I think of ways of dramatically setting up contrasts so that my position on a thing is clear to me, and then I hound the thing till it rolls over. I certainly wouldn't ever fake the actions, or the characters, or make people say what they wouldn't say. I never use sleight-of-wits like Stanley Elkin—though no one can fail to admire a really good sophist's skill.

INTERVIEWER

How important is setting?

GARDNER

Setting is one of the most powerful symbols you have, but mainly it serves characterization. The first thing that makes a reader read a book is the characters. Say you're standing in a train station, or an airport, and you're leafing through books; what you're hoping for is a book where you'll like the characters, where the characters are interesting. To establish powerful characters, a writer needs a landscape to help define them; so setting becomes important. Setting is also a powerful vehicle

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of thematic concerns; in fact, it's one of the most powerful. If you're going to talk about the decline of Western civilization or at least the possibility of that decline, you take an old place that's sort of worn out and run-down. For instance, Batavia, New York, where the Holland Land Office was. . .the beginning of a civilization. . .selling the land in this country. It was, in the beginning, a wonderful, beautiful place with the smartest indians in America around. Now it's this old, run-down town which has been urban-renewalized just about out of existence. The factories have stopped and the people are poor and sometimes crabby; the elm trees are all dead, and so are the oaks and maples. So it's a good symbol. If you're writing the kind of book I was writing in *Sunlight Dialogues* or *The Resurrection,* both of them books about death, both spiritual death and the death of civilization, you choose a place like that. I couldn't have found, in my experience, a better setting. It's just not a feeling you have in San Francisco. If I was going to write a book about Southern Illinois, which in fact I did in *King's Indian,* that's another, completely different feeling. There it's as if human beings had never landed; the human beings—the natives, anyway—seem more like gnomes. You choose the setting that suits and illuminates your material.

INTERVIEWER

The Resurrection, Sunlight Dialogues, Nickel Mountain, October Light, all take place in your native surroundings more or less; do you find that you need distance on a place before you can write about it? Would you have been able to get a proper perspective on these places in the East, and the type of people who live there, if you'd not spent a good deal of your time in the West and Midwest?

GARDNER

I don't really think so. It's true that *The Resurrection* and *Sunlight Dialogues* take place in Batavia. I wrote one of them in California, the other partly in California, and partly in

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southern Illinois. So I was using memories from my childhood. Every once in a while, I'd go back and see my parents and go over and see the Brumsteds and the characters who show up in the story, and I'd look the streets over and think, that'd be funny to put in a novel, or whatever. But *Nickel Mountain* is set in the Catskills, which I'd only passed through once or twice, and when I did *October Light*, which came out of a very direct and immediate experience in the East, I'd just moved back to the East after years away. I'd never been in Vermont and the landscape and the feeling of the people is not at all like western New York. I had never seen anything like it; I certainly didn't have any distance on it. It may be that ten years from now when I look the book over I'll see that I didn't do it very well, but now it feels just as authentic to me as the other books I've written. So I don't think you necessarily do need distance. It is certainly true though that memory selects well. What you keep in your memory is psychologically symbolic, hence powerful, so that when you write about things that you knew a long time ago, you're going to get a fairly powerful evocation of place. I think one sees that in Bernard Malamud's work. When he writes about his childhood, his early memories of New York, you get a very powerful sense of the place. But I think in *The New Life*, written out of immediate experience, you get a more superficial sense of place.

It's different; nobody could deny that the landscapes in *The New Life* are vivid, it's just that they don't have that *lived* feeling that the earlier cityscapes have. You have to write about what's useful and that's the problem; you can't just write about the place that's the most digested for you. In a really good writer's work you'll see that a writer doesn't have to have been around a place very long at all. John Fowles' novel *Daniel Martin* has got some long sections on Los Angeles which seem to be absolutely incredible. You'd swear he grew up there. Most people writing about Los Angeles can only see the phoniness, the greenery and the gilt. Fowles sees everything, and he gets in it.

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INTERVIEWER

Your *belief* in literature, your affection for it as a living force, goes back pretty far in your childhood. Did you read mostly the classics when you were a boy?

GARDNER

Not mostly—we had a lot of books. My mother was a schoolteacher, and my father was a farmer who loved to read: classics, Shakespeare, and of course, the Bible. They were great reciters of literature, too. I've had visitors—sophisticated people—who've heard my father recite things, and have been amazed at how powerfully he does it. It's an old country tradition, but my father was and is the best. We'd be put to bed with a recital of poetry, things like that. At Grange meetings, for instance, my mother and father would do recitations as part of the evening's entertainment. Or while my father was milking the cows my mother would come out and read something to him—*Lear*, say—leaving out the part of whomever my father felt like being that day, and he'd answer his lines from the cow.

INTERVIEWER

He actually had the whole thing memorized?

GARDNER

Oh, sure. Lots of plays. And he'd write things—lay sermons, stories—while he was driving his tractor: compose them in his head, rather like Ben Hodge in *Sunlight*. Not that Ben Hodge is exactly like my father. My father isn't weak-willed. My father knows hundreds of poems, including some very long ones. Beautiful to listen to. A lot of people that we dismiss as terrible poets, like Longfellow, are changed entirely when you say their poems out loud—as they were intended to be. It's like singing; a song can't be very complex; the tune takes up part of the energy so that the words are kind of silly on the page, but when you sing it, it may be wonderful. The same thing happens with oral poetry—lots of

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stuff that's thin, even goofy on the page can be recited beautifully. That's one of the reasons I write the way I do. Oral stuff written. I hope that comes through.

INTERVIEWER

Did you do any writing as a child?

GARDNER

I started writing stories when I was five or so—making these books I'd send to relatives every Christmas. And around eight, I was writing longer things. . . I wrote in ledger books given to me by my grandmother the lawyer. I really enjoyed writing on ledger paper: there's something nice about a page with a red line down the middle.

INTERVIEWER

Do you still use them?

GARDNER

No, I own my own typewriter now. Very professional.

INTERVIEWER

Is there an advantage to growing up on a farm?

GARDNER

Farm boys have some advantages; it depends on the family. I learned to love the land at least partly because my parents did—working it, watching things grow. Farm boys spend a lot of time with animals of all kinds. I liked it. Some don't. Also, sometimes on the happiest farms, the hunger comes to get away from all that work, and so they may see New York with more excited eyes than some New Yorkers do; or Chicago, or Los Angeles. I love all those places, even the ones that everybody else hates. I have a little trouble with Cleveland, but parts of it are nice. But except for short stints in San Francisco, Chicago and Detroit, my whole life has either been living in the country, working with plants and animals, read-

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ing and writing. It's nice to live in the country when you grew up there and worked yourself to death in the old days and now you don't have to; you just have a few horses and you play.

INTERVIEWER

What did you study at college?

GARDNER

The usual things—wanted to major in chemistry for a while. In graduate school I studied creative writing and Medieval Literature mostly. It was useful. I learned a lot of things about an older kind of literature that I thought would be handy in writing my own works, if only because I wouldn't be doing the same thing as everybody else.

INTERVIEWER

Is your fiction at all autobiographical? Do you write about people you know specifically, do you write about yourself?

GARDNER

Sometimes. My fiction is usually autobiographical, but in a distant almost unrecognizable way. Once in a while, as in the story "Redemption," I write pretty close to what happened. But I fictionalized that too—which worries me, in fact. When you get to an event that close to real life and you change the characters, you run the risk of your sister, or your mother or father thinking: "You don't understand me. That wasn't what I was thinking." I *know* that's not what they were thinking, but I need searchlights on a piece, so I have to change characters, make them more appropriate to the fictional idea, the *real* subject, which isn't just history. Usually though, I'm not interested—as Updike and Malamud are—in celebrating my own life. I use feelings that I have myself—the only feelings I know, directly—and I deal them out to a group of characters, and let the characters fight out the problems that I've been fighting out. Characteristically there's a

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battle in my fiction between the hunger for roots, stability, law, and another element in my character which is anarchic. I hate to obey speed laws. I hate to park where it says you have to park. I hate to have to be someplace on time. And in fact I often don't do those things I know I should do, which of course fills me with uneasiness and guilt. Every time you break the law you pay, and every time you obey the law you pay. That compulsion not to do what people tell me, to avoid tic repetitions, makes me constantly keep pushing the edges. It makes me change places of living, or change my life in one way or another, which often makes me very unhappy. I wish I could just settle down. I keep promising myself that really soon now I'm going to get this little farm or maybe house and take care of it, never move again. But I'll probably never do it. Anyway, the autobiographical element is more emotional than anything else.

INTERVIEWER

How do you name your characters?

GARDNER

Sometimes I use characters from real life, and sometimes I use their real names—when I do, it's always in celebration of people that I like. Once or twice, as in *October Light*, I've borrowed other people's fictional characters. Naming is only a problem, of course, when you make the character up. It seems to me that every character—every person—is an embodiment of a very complicated, philosophical way of looking at the world, whether conscious or not. Names can be strong clues to the characters system. Names are magic. If you name a kid John, he'll grow up a different kid than if you named him Rudolph. I've used real characters in every single novel, except in *Grendel* where it's impossible—they didn't have our kinds of names in those days—but even in *Grendel* I used jokes and puns that give you clues to who I'm talking about. For instance there's a guy named Red Horse, which is really a sorrel, which is really George Sorel. And so on. Sometimes I

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put real live characters into books under fictional names—to protect the real person from what the fiction makes of him—and thus I get the pleasure of thinking, for example, what my cousin Bill would do if he were confronted with a particular problem. I get to understand my cousin Bill, whom I love, in a way I never understood him before. I get to see him in a situation perhaps more grave, certainly more compromising, than any he's ever been in. Besides using real people, as I've said, I get great pleasure out of stealing other people's writings. Actually, I do that at least partly because of a peculiar and unfortunate quality of my mind: I remember things. Word for word. I'm not always aware of it. Once in college, I wrote a paragraph of a novel which was word for word out of Joyce's "The Dead," and I wasn't aware of it at all. I absolutely wasn't. My teacher at the time said why did you do this? He wasn't accusing me of plagiarism, he was just saying it was a very odd thing to do. I realized then that I had a problem. Of course, it was a big help when I was a teacher, because I could quote long passages of Beowulf and things like that. Once I realized that I also accidentally quote, that I'm constantly alluding to things I'm not consciously aware of, I began to develop this allusive technique—at least when it's fiction—so that nobody could accuse me of plagiarism since it's so obvious that I'm alluding. In fact, sometimes I have great fun with it. Particularly in *Jason and Medeia,* where I took long sections of writing by Bill Gass, whom I'm enormously fond of, and with whom I completely disagree on almost everything unimportant, and altered a few words to mess up his argument. And in *The Wreck of Agathon* I took long sections out of Jean-Paul Sartre, changed all the images, but kept the rest directly translated. So I use everything.

INTERVIEWER

How do your victims react? Is Sartre aware? Or Gass?

GARDNER

I'm sure Sartre has never heard of me. I hope he'd be

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amused. As for Gass, he knows why I do it: partly from impishness, partly for a comically noble reason which has to do with Gass's present and future fame.

INTERVIEWER

How do you react to Peter Prescott's insinuation in *Newsweek* that you plagiarized in your *Life and Times of Chaucer*?

GARDNER

With a sigh.

INTERVIEWER

How about the charge that you're, excuse the expression, a male chauvinist?

GARDNER

Consciously, I'm a feminist; but neither the best things we do or the worst are fully conscious. That's why the effect of art is so important. One does not consciously make oneself more bestial by reading pornographic books, and I think only the worst sort of people become consciously "better" people by reading the Bible. When I'm accused of male chauvinism, as I was in one review of *Nickel Mountain,* I'm indignant and hurt; but I watch myself more closely to see if it's true. I've also been accused of being anti-homosexual. I'm glad I was accused, because although I wasn't aware of that bigotry, the accusation was just. I don't want to hurt people.

INTERVIEWER

What about the influences of being a teacher?

GARDNER

My academic career has, of course, had considerable influence on my writing of fiction and poetry, though I hope my writing has had no effect on my scholarship and teaching—except to boost my university salary, attract students I might otherwise not meet, and get me invited to visit now and then

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at other universities. When I first began teaching my main job was in creative writing and I discovered very quickly that it's fairly easy to transform an eager intelligent student to a publishing creative writer. Silly as it sounds, that discovery was a shock to my ego and changed my whole approach to writing fiction. (I was twenty-four, twenty-five at the time.) Since I found out that anyone has stories he can tell, and, once you've shown him a little technique, can tell them relatively well, I was determined to set myself apart from the herd (I was reading that devil Neitzsche then) by writing as other people couldn't. I became a mildly fanatic stylist, and experimenter with form, and so on. Also, I quit teaching creative writing, maybe partly from annoyance that my students were as good as I was, but mainly in hopes of learning the things I had to know to become a good writer. I began teaching History of Criticism courses, which turned out to be one of the most valuable experiences in my life.

INTERVIEWER

I don't mean to dwell on this, but it's obviously a subject you've thought about a lot. Any more specific effects of your teaching on your writing?

GARDNER

Two more, at least. One is, it's given me material—a lot of it—with which to give a modern story-line resonance. For instance, though I don't mention it in the novel, Chief Fred Clumly in *Sunlight* once read Dante on a ship, though he no longer remembers it. It sank deep into the swamp of his mind and now throws strange light on his modern-seeming problems. The narrator of the novel has obviously read and pondered hard on Malory's *Morte D'Arthur,* which presents a medieval world view totally opposed to Dante's. I mention this not because I care how readers read the novel but because it shows, more clearly than anything else I can say, the usefulness of my scholarly work in my writing. Nobody but Blake—except possibly Stanley Elkin—can churn up ideas and images

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with the genius of Blake. But stealing the ideas and images of brilliant men like Dante and Malory (and of course many others), forcing them into confrontation, trying to find some sane resolution to the opposition of such minds and values, a writer can not only get new insights but get, far more important, rich texture and an energy of language beyond the energy of mere conflict in plot. Which is to say, my subject really is (as one critic once mentioned), human history—the conflict of ideas and emotions through the ages.

The other important effect of my teaching on my writing is that, working with intelligent undergraduate and graduate students—and working alongside intelligent teachers—I have a clear idea of my audience, or anyway of a hypothetical audience. I don't think a writer can write well without some such notions. One may claim one writes for oneself, but it's a paltry claim. One more word on all this, I'm obviously convinced that my scholarly career has made me a better writer than I would have been without it, but I'm no longer concerned—as I was in my tempestuous, ego maddened youth—with proving myself the greatest writer of all time. What I notice now is that all around me there are first-rate writers, and in nearly every case it seems to me that what makes them first-rate is their similar involvement in teaching and scholarship. There are exceptions—maybe William Gaddis, I'm not sure. (A brilliant writer, though I disapprove of him.) Perhaps the most important exception is John Updike, who, unlike John Hawkes, Bill Gass, Stanley Elkin and Saul Bellow and so on, is not a teacher. But the exception means nothing, because, teacher or not, he's the most academic of all.

INTERVIEWER

What about the teaching of creative writing?

GARDNER

When you teach creative writing, you discover a great deal. For instance, if a student's story is really wonderful, but thin, you have to analyze to figure out why it's thin; how you could

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beef it up. Every discovery of that kind is important. When you're reading only classical and medieval literature, all the bad stuff has been filtered out. There are no bad works in either Greek or Anglo-Saxon. Even the ones that are minor are the very best of the minor, because everything else has been lost or burned or thrown away. When you read this kind of literature, you never really learn how a piece can go wrong, but when you teach creative writing, you see a thousand ways that a piece can go wrong. So it's helpful to me. The other thing that's helpful when you're teaching creative writing is that there are an awful lot of people who at the age of seventeen or eighteen can write as well as you do. That's a frightening discovery. So you ask yourself, what am I doing? Here I've decided that what I'm going to be in life is to be this literary artist, at best; I'm going to stand with Tolstoy, Melville and all the boys. And there's this kid, nineteen, who's writing just as well. The characters are vividly perceived, the rhythm in the story is wonderful. What have I got that he hasn't got? You begin to think harder and harder about what makes great fiction. That can lead you to straining and over-blowing your own fiction, which I've done sometimes, but it's useful to think about.

INTERVIEWER

What are some specific things you can teach in creative writing?

GARDNER

When you teach creative writing, you teach people, among other things, how to plot. You explain the principles, how it is that fiction *thinks*. And to give the kids a sense of how a plot works, you just spin out plot after plot after plot. In an hour session, you may spin out forty possible plots, one adhering to the real laws of energeia, each one a balance of the particular and general—and not one of them a story that you'd really want to write. Then one time, you hit one that *catches* you for some reason—you hit on the story that ex-

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presses your unrest. When I was teaching creative writing at Chico State, for instance, one of many plots I spun out was *The Resurrection.*

INTERVIEWER

How does this work?

GARDNER

One plot will just sort of rise above all the others for reasons that you don't fully understand. All of them are interesting, all of them have interesting characters, all of them talk about things that you could talk about; but one of them catches you like a nightmare. Then you have no choice but to write it; you can't forget it. It's a weird thing. If it's the kind of plot you really don't want to do because it involves your mother too closely, or whatever, you can try to do something else. But the typewriter keeps hissing at you and shooting sparks, and the paper keeps wrinkling and the lamp goes off and nothing else works, so finally you do the one that God said you've got to do. And once you do it, you're grounded. It's an amazing thing. For instance, before I wrote the story about the kid who runs over his younger brother ("Redemption"), always, regularly, every day I used to have four or five flashes of that accident. I'd be driving down the highway and I couldn't see what was coming because I'd have a memory flash. I haven't had it once since I wrote the story. You really do ground your nightmares, you *name* them. When you write a story, you have to play that image, no matter how painful, over and over until you've got all the sharp details so you know exactly how to put it down on paper. By the time you've run your mind through it a hundred times, relentlessly worked every tic of your terror, it's lost its power over you. That's what bibliotherapy is all about, I guess. You take crazy people and have them write their story, better and better, and soon it's just a story on a page, or, more precisely, everybody's story on a page. It's a wonderful thing. Which isn't to say that I think writing is done for the health of the writer, though it certainly does incidentally have that effect.

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INTERVIEWER

Do you feel that literary techniques can really be taught? Some people feel that technique is an artifice or even a hindrance to "true expression."

GARDNER

Certainly it can be taught. But a teacher has to *know* technique to teach it. I've seen a lot of writing teachers because I go around visiting colleges, visiting creative writing classes. A terrible number of awful ones, grotesquely bad. That doesn't mean that one should throw writing out of the curriculum; because when you get a good creative writing class it's magisterial. Most of the writers I know in the world don't know they do what they do. Most of them *feel* it out. Bernard Malamud and I had a conversation one time in which he said that he doesn't know how he does those magnificent things he sometimes does. He just keeps writing until it comes out right. If that's the way a writer works, than that's the way he had to work and that's fine. But I like to be in control as much of the time as possible. One of the first things you have to understand when you are writing fiction—or teaching writing—is that there are different ways of doing things, and each one has a slightly different effect. A misunderstanding of this leads you to the Bill Gass position: that fiction can't tell the truth, because every way you say the thing changes it. I don't think that's to the point. I think that what fiction does is sneak up on the truth by telling it six different ways and finally releasing it. That's what Dante said, that you can't really get at the poetic, inexpressible truths, that the way things are leaps up like steam between them. So you have to determine very accurately the potential of a particular writer's style and help that potential develop at the same time, ignoring what you think of his moral stands.

I hate nihilistic, cynical writing. I hate it. It bothers me and worse yet bores me. But if I have a student who writes with morbid delight about murder, what I'll have to do (though of course I'll tell him I don't like this kind of writing, that it's

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immoral, stupid and bad for civilization), is say what is successful about the work and what is not. I have to swallow every bit of my moral feelings to help the writer write his way, his truth. It may be that the most moral writing of all is writing which shows us how a murderer feels, how it happens. It may be it will protect us from murderers someday.

INTERVIEWER

You've recently had essays appear on the subject of what you call "moral fiction" and "moral criticism." Some readers might have trouble with the word "moral." Could you explain what you mean by "moral"? The word, as you've acknowledged, has pejorative implications these days.

GARDNER

I know. It shouldn't. I certainly don't mean fiction that preaches. I'm talking mainly—though not exclusively—about works of fiction that are moral in their process. That is to say, the way they *work* is moral. Good works of fiction study values by testing them in imagined/real situations, testing them hard, being absolutely fair to both sides. The real moral writer is the opposite of the minister, the preacher, the rabbi. Insofar as he can, the preacher tries to keep religion as it always was, outlawing contraceptives or whatever; his job is conservative. The writer's job on the other hand, is to be radically open to persuasion. He should, if possible, not be committed to one side more than to the other—which is simply to say that he wants to affirm life, not sneer at it—but he has to be absolutely fair, understand the moral limits of his partisanship. His affirmation has to be earned. If he favors the cop, he must understand the arguments for life on the side of the robber.

INTERVIEWER

What would be "immoral" literature?

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GARDNER

Mainly, fiction goes immoral when it stops being fair, when it stops trusting the laboratory experiment. You lie about characters, you make people do what you want them to do. This is characteristic of most hot-shot writers around now. I would agree with people who get nervous around the word "morality" because usually the people who shout "immoral" are those who want to censor things, or think that all bathroom scenes or bedroom scenes or whatever are wicked. That kind of morality is life-denying, evil. But I *do* think morality is a real thing that's worth talking about. I thought of using some other word so that people wouldn't be mad at me for talking like a minister, but I decided that's the right word. It means what it means, and the fact that it's out of style doesn't matter very much. It's like patriotism, which has got a very bad name because devils keep yelling for it. Ultimately patriotism ought not to mean that you hate all other countries. It ought to mean that you love certain things about your country; you want them to change. Unfortunately, when you say "patriotism," everybody goes "aargh." Same thing with morality.

INTERVIEWER

Do you see the risk of dogmatism in your thesis on what fiction and criticism ought to be?

GARDNER

No, only a risk of dogmatism in stubborn or witness misinterpretations of my thesis, of which there have been, alas, many. I'm sure that no matter how carefully I write about true morality, some self-righteous ignoramus will read it too fast and say, "Aha, he's on our side." He will use me to support awful ideas, and I'm sorry about that. I don't think real morality can ever be codified. You can't say "Thou shalt not," and you can't say "Thou shalt." What you *can* say is that this is how people feel and why they feel the way they do. My argument in *Moral Fiction* is this: that immoral fiction

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is indifferent to the real issues. I'm saying that there's good and evil. And in particular situations, maybe the only healthy situation is universal destruction. I would never set up a morality that's goody-goody. Sometimes morality is awful. Fiction can never pronounce ultimate solutions, but it can lead to understanding. It leads and that's all. It gives visions of what's possible. If I were going to write a book which told people how to live, I would write an incredibly meticulous book about Indian gurus, Jewish heroes, Christian saints. I would present every right argument and show clearly and logically what the wrong sides are. It would be simple, except that logic is never to be trusted. And everybody who read my book would say, if I did my job brilliantly, that's the way to live. The trouble is they wouldn't read the book because it would be boring, and even if they did read and understand, they wouldn't be moved to action. The book wouldn't be interesting because it wouldn't show people we care about growing toward the truth. If you show characters struggling to know what's right, and in the process of the novel you work out their issues more and more clearly, whether the character heroically wins or tragically loses, *then* you move the reader, having first moved yourself. I think morality has to be persuasive. And you can only be persuasive if you start with imperfect human beings. Of course, if you wind up with *perfect* human beings, that's a bore too. I guess the morality of the fiction is the seriousness of the question and the seriousness of the concern with imaginary people's lives and feelings—a reflection of real people's lives and feelings—not the seriousness or logicality of the answer.

INTERVIEWER

Should the writer examine the morality of a piece before, say, the quality of its prose, its interest and saleability?

GARDNER

Certainly morality should come first—for writers, critics, and everybody else. People who change tires. People in fac-

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tories. They should always ask, is this moral? Not, will it sell. If you're in construction and building houses out of shingles and you realize that you're wiping out ten thousand acres of Canadian pine every year, you should ask yourself, can I make it cheaper or as cheaply out of clay? Because clay is inexhaustible. Everyplace there's dirt. A construction owner should say, I don't have to be committed to this particular product; I can go for the one which will make me money, *and* make a better civilization. Occasionally businessmen actually do that. The best will even settle for a profit cut. The same thing is true of writers—ultimately it comes down to, are you making or are you destroying? If you try very hard to create ways of living, create dreams of what is possible, then you win. If you don't, you may make a fortune in ten years, but you're not going to be read in twenty years, and that's that. Why do something cheap? I can't understand people who go for the moment of the book. In the long run, Melville's estate is worth vastly more than the estate of Octave Thanet. Octave Thanet was, I think, the best selling novelist of the nineteenth century. Melville told the truth, Thanet told high-minded lies. All liars are soon dead, forgotten. Dickens' novels didn't sell half as well as a novel of Octave Thanet's called *A Slave to Duty*. But you haven't heard of her, right? I know of her only because I know obscure facts.

INTERVIEWER

And that is why certain works of fiction have lasted, and others have disappeared?

GARDNER

Of course. So I believe. The ones that last are the ones that are true. You look at Faulkner and John O'Hara. John O'Hara outsold Faulkner, he circled Faulkner at the time they were writing. Ten years after his death, O'Hara's books are out of print. We all read Faulkner, nobody reads O'Hara. Dreiser in some ways, some of the time, is one of the worst writers who ever lived. *An American Tragedy*, for instance, is an endless

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book with terrible sentences like "He found her extremely intellectually interesting." But by the time you finish the book, you've sopped your vest. He's a great writer, though he wrote badly. But what he does morally, that is to say what he does in terms of analysis of character and honest statement about the way the world is, is very good. Of course, some writers last a long time because of their brilliance, their style; Fitzgerald is a good example—a fine stylist. But he never quite got to the heart of things. *That's* what should concern the critics. If a critic is concerned with only how well the sentences go, or how neat the symbolic structure is, or how new the devices are, he's going to exaggerate the importance of mediocre books. Samuel Beckett—surely one of the great writers of our time despite my objections—is loved by critics, but except for John Fowles, I hear no one pointing out that the tendency of all he says is wrong. He says it powerfully, with comi-tragic brilliance, and he believes it, but what he says is not quite sound. Every night Samuel Beckett goes home to his wife, whom he's lived with all these years; he lies down in bed with her, puts his arms around her, and says, "No meaning again today..." Critics can say, and do say, well it doesn't matter what he says, it's how well he says it. But I think in the long run Beckett is in for it. Because great writers tell the truth exactly—and get it right. A man can be a brilliant writer who writes wonderful lines, and still say what is just not so; like Sartre, Beckett—and in his lapses, Faulkner. Faulkner's sentimentality in the bad moments—every reader knows he's missing a little. I like Dilsey. I believe Dilsey really exists but I just don't believe that Faulkner understands her or really cares. He's more interested in Dilsey as a symbol than as a person. Everything that Faulkner says about Dilsey is no doubt true...it's just all those things he didn't say, the things that make her fully human, not just a symbol. Mythologizing her—or accepting the standard mythology of his age—he slightly skews the inevitability of his story. He does the same thing every time he turns on his mannered

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rhetoric—distorts the inherent emotion of the story and thus gets diverted from the real and inevitable progress of events.

INTERVIEWER

You've said there are exceptions to your thesis on moral fiction. Could you mention a few?

GARDNER

First, there's fiction that's neither moral nor immoral—minor fiction, pure entertainment. I'm accused of not valuing it, but actually all I say is that it's trivial: I'm not at all against it except when some critic takes it seriously. I favor it as on a hot day I favor ice cream. Second, there's fiction I'd call moral only in the earnestness of its concern. This kind of fiction I would *not* call trivial. There's one man whose name is Ernest Finney. He's a wonderful writer. He sent me his fiction, he's been writing for years, unpublished. He writes grim, frightening stories. But I would certainly publish them if I had a magazine. Absolutely no question. One is about a lower class guy, tough; he's got a good car, a T-Bird, third hand. He marries this beautiful girl who's kind of a whore. She finally gets his money and disappears. He's making his money stealing. He goes to prison. All the time he's in prison, he plans on killing her. That's all he cares about, that's all he thinks about. His idea is to put a shotgun up her and blow her to smithereens. You understand exactly why he feels the way he does. It's a very powerful, terrifying story. Because you become the character. You would do it too.

INTERVIEWER

How does this fit any standard we've talked about?

GARDNER

Well, I think it's moral fiction, but in a tricky way. Finney does honestly describe a situation. He's not looking for ways that we could live better—the highest way—but he's describing exactly, and with original genius, how it feels to want to

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kill your wife. Terribly difficult. It's moral fiction of the third degree. Moral fiction can exist in only three forms. The highest form is moral fiction in which you see absolutely accurate description of the best people; fiction that gives you an idea how to live. It's uplifting: you want to be like the hero. You want to be like Jesus, or Buddha, or Moses, whatever. Tolstoy does it. Everybody wants to be like Pierre in *War and Peace*. Everybody wants to be like Levin in *Anna Karenina*. In the next form of moral fiction you see an evil person and you realize you don't want to be like that. Like Macbeth. You see there's an alternative. You don't have to be like Macbeth. It's kind of negative moral fiction, or moral fiction in the tragic mode, where you want to be different than the protagonist—you want to be better. Then there's the third form, wherein alternatives don't exist. Not for fashion's sake or for the cheap love of gruesomeness, but from anger and concern, you stare into the smoking volcano. That's the world of Ernest Finney's fiction, or Constance Urdgang's. You understand exactly why a wife would want to kill her husband, saw up the body, and put it in a suitcase. We've all read the newspaper stories about this kind of thing. It happens. But only a great artist can show it happen so that you feel that you saw it, and saw it from inside the murderer's mind: you understand. That doesn't tell you what you should do. It doesn't tell you, I don't want to be like that. But it makes you understand and, understanding, hunger for a world not like this. It's obviously the least uplifting of the three kinds of moral fiction, but it's morally useful. Mostly what we get, it seems to me, is "serious" fiction not in any of those three categories. People kill people, we don't understand why they did it, we don't care why they did it, we read it because it's cheaply thrilling, an escape from the common decency we sometimes feel trapped in. Blood drips, people piss on people or live their boring "lives of quiet desperation." It's at worst a kind of sick daydream, at best useless actuality, not morally worth reading.

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INTERVIEWER

What effect do you think your writing has had?

GARDNER

I think it has given a few readers pleasure. And I suppose it may have depressed a few. I hope it does more good than harm.

—PAUL F. FERGUSON
JOHN R. MAIER
FRANK McCONNELL
SARA MATTHIESSEN

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Five Poems by Allen Grossman

The Woman on the Bridge Over the Chicago River

Stars are tears falling with light inside.
In the moon, they say, is a sea of tears.
It is well known that the wind weeps.
The lapse of all streams is a form of weeping,
And the heaving swell of the sea.

Cormorants
Weep from the cliffs;
The gant weeps crossing the air of a room;
And a moth weeps in the eye of the lamp.
Each leaf is a soul in tears.

Roses weep
In the dawn light. Each tear of the rose
Is like a lens. Around the roses the garden
Weeps in a thousand particular voices.
Under earth the bones weep, and the old tears
And new mingle without difference.
A million years does not take off the freshness
Of the calling.

Eternity and Time
Grieve incessantly in one another's arms.
Being weeps, and Nothing weeps, in the same
Night-tent, averted,
Yet mingling sad breaths. And from all ideas
Hot tears irrepressible.

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In a corner
Of the same tent a small boy in a coat
Sobs and sobs,

while under the Atlantic
Depth and Darkness grieve among the fountains,
And the fountains weep out the grieving sea.

O listen, the steam engines shunt and switch
Asleep in their grieving. A sad family
In the next house over shifts mournfully
About staining the dim blind. The boy looks up
As the grieving sound of his own begetting
Keeps on,
And his willow mother mars her mirror
Of the lake with tears.

It is cold and snowing
And the snow is falling into the river.
On the bridge, lit by the white shadow of
The Wrigley building
A small woman wrapped in an old blue coat
Staggers to the rail weeping.

As I remember,
The same boy passes, announcing the fame
Of tears, calling out the terms
In a clear way, translating to the long
Dim human avenue.

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By the Pool

Every dwelling is a desolate hill.
Every hill is a desolate dwelling.

The trees toss their branches in the dark air,
Each tree after its kind, and each kind after
Its own way. The wind tosses the branches
Of the trees in the dark air. The swimming
Pool is troubled by the wind, and the swimmers.

Even though this is not a tower, this is
Also a tower.

Even though you are not
A watchman, you are also a watchman.

Even though the night has not yet come,
The night has come.

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The Field, Her Pleasure

Thunder over the field, voices
Of Memory, memory of the voices
And of thunder, thunder of memory
Over the field, slow after-speaking
To the lightning bolt, burdened
Interpreter of the quick, bright
Scratch.

And then the following
Spirit of the crepuscular
Small rain.

There is a man still
Sitting at the field's edge. The rain
Touches him here and there. And he
Sees her pleasure. It is rainy
Green. The lightning writes upon it,
And then the thunder in its time
Offers a meaning.

But the rain is
A kingdom with its own god
Over which the thunder batters
Like the "ach, ach" of strange dogs,
And birdsong rises from the grasses.

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The man owes the field a name—
Perhaps, "Her Pleasure."
Behind him is the house where she
Is but the field is her pleasure.
In the field are the graves of strangers—
Who are the strangers buried in
The field of her pleasure?

In the dark
Field is a green stream,
A sort of track that with the fainter
Mazy tracks of other streams
Leads down to a standing pond
And the one willow.

Out of the fascination
Of her eye, he sees at last the green
Court of her whole love.

At the pond's
Edge she is there—
With a long pole, in the dawn light
Pulling the sunfish up.

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The Comet

The child and I waked in the dark.
Both cold
We walked the quarter mile to where the ridge
Gave us such sky
As was not hidden in the upper branches
Of the dying elms.

Winter had stopped both death and life in them.
I said,
"The sun will rise this morning South of East"—
Thinking,
This is no time for children. And yet it's not
The strangeness of the hour
But the promises it may not keep
That is the terror.
Thinking,
"We rise on stepping stones of our dead selves"—
Not rise, but grow
More haunted, being of our own too passionate
Last state the tomb or haunted house.

We came to see the comet—something
Promised.
The child in a long life might see it twice.
I stood
Proud pedagogue on a bitten hill, saying
"These are the stars,
And this gash—bleeding light—portendeth wars."

Thinking,
Wisdom is not seeing the meadow in one season
But in more than one season; not seeing
The world in one life, but in more than one life.
And then—
The dawn came on like the heating of iron.

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Victory

There is a radiance about the bed,
From which I turn to take account of the
Radiance, the still space of the bed.

The household is filled with unborn children
(Some will be born. Some will not be born.)
Chattering on the stairs in the two languages
Of the born and the unborn. I sleep reading
The bright day backward like a Hebrew book.

Today, I saw the whole body of ocean
From a hill. First I looked away. Then I
Looked, and there it was.

The children were playing
On the rocks. There was a woman I knew
Down there. Then I saw the whole ocean,
And we were no more scattered
Like swallows, or flowing from the broken
Hill like shards, but the swallows as they were
Before the scattering.

I love you more.

The bed is a mountain, and the light is
The magnanimity of the mountain,
In the still space of the room where I sleep.
On the mountain we met a young hunter
Who asked the way of us, and did not wait
But strode off without the answer in another
Direction.

We climbed the iced flume
Carrying the answer to the grim rage
Of the top, where the whole earth stands, in the
Peril of high seeing—bed and abyss:

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Birth bed, and sex bed, night storm bed of the
River dream, death bed of the born (despair
Of the unborn). I have come up now
Into the cloudy stone, and I have seen the earth
And I have seen the sea in the magnanimity
Of mountain light.

From the summit voices
Seemed to come. But when we climbed up there,
Our beards frozen, eyes turned from the wind, we
Found no one, and I had this thought, "She will
Never come. Not to him, not to me—alone of men."

And so if I bind on Apollo's phylacteries
I do it now to tell the plain truth.
Come, I will stop this talking. That is what
This voice inside you I am saying means.
Let us draw the black ship down to the divine sea—
Set the purple sail to the great death winds
Of the South, and empty
Out the burden of our singing, you and I.
This is the whole ocean. Also the end.
After the wind stops,

the sound of the wind.

In the still space of the bed, I dream
The poet died. He had great difficulty
Dying.
He was reading a book about dying.
And then he died.

And the woman Victory
Unbound the strap from his forehead
And the other strap from his arm, and laid
Them by.

And then she rested from her triumphing.
She unbound her breasts, and she rested.

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John Peech

The Hardness of the Wind

> **Also every gunner ought to weather the mark according to the hardness of the wind, and the distance unto the mark: for as the wind being with him will cause a pellet to fly beyond the mark according to the hardness of the wind.**
> *Duties of a Cannoneer, Nicolo Tartaglia, 1537*

As a child I would awaken,
midsummer, cicadas buzzing
their alarm from oak trees whose
trunks were houses for imaginary friends,
and cracking the Venetian blinds,
would see parked in the driveway
across the street a truck towing
a huge silver cannon. At last
the circus was in Syracuse! As close
as it would ever get to Ithaca.

The doctor living across the street
had retired young, quit to follow the circus,
city to city, while dying of cancer (though no one
was supposed to know). He knew all the stars
who were always welcome to spend the night;
he himself a champion gymnast while
in med school told us many times
how he broke his leg on a trampoline
the day before the nationals.
There was no time for breakfast.
Barely dressed, I was across the street
ringing the doorbell, to see again

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the great Zacchini, a short man,
perhaps growing less tall with each
year of firings, nearly bald,
who said little (and mainly in Italian
to his wife), who would not tell even
the doctor how he did the cannon.
Was it a giant firecracker, or a coiled
spring that launched him with a puff
of smoke 500 feet through the air,
always safely caught like a wingless
butterfly in the net, bobbing to his feet
to meet the standing ovation of the crowd?

He spoke of waiting each performance day,
inspection of the cannon, the rigging
of the nets. Then once a night he dared
what was once for him a thrill.
That summer day, he let me climb atop
his cannon, but would not remove
the canvas muzzle plug to let me *just once*
slip down the barrel to sense the minute
before the muffled drumroll ends, while
checking the angle of the knees, the gloved
hands set to guide, or so he said.
But never the secret of how.

Zacchini is gone. The doctor refused morphine
even at the end, or so my father told me.
His wife still keeps the house well dusted
for her bridge groups and book clubs,
but the circus people never stop to visit.
Touring with old trucks whose worn brakes
make downhills like flying on a trapeze,
those performers may pass through Ithaca
remembering that doctor who filmed
them all with his hand-held Kodak.
His wife never shows the movies.

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Fall. It's hurricane season now, though Boston
rarely sees one. Last week the French Quarter
was threatened, but some unknown
Louisiana town was hit instead.
The morning haze clings as I emerge
from the South Station subway, and cannot
see my office window in the Keystone building.
With effort I begin reading about designs
for nuclear power plants to withstand the force
of hurricanes. A scientific study tells

that somewhere in Illinois they are
constructing a cannon to fire telephone poles
into concrete, to measure their penetration
as if blown by a 300 mph wind. The report
goes on to question the wind velocity
in the funnel of a cyclone.
Someone in Kansas recently reported
to the AEC that tornados have twice
hit his farm, each time plucking all
the feathers from his chickens.

So now someone is stuffing live chickens
down the muzzle of still another cannon,
whose muzzle velocity can be varied.
A footnote states that whereas many
of the barnyard chickens survived
tornados without their feathers,
not a single chicken has yet endured
the cannon. I tell you this as I stare
at an antique poster, dry mounted
on a crackless wall, daring one and all
to see the Great Flying Zacchini.

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Two Poems by Alan Nadel

To Summer

You can only have a lot of power,
never enough:
the strength to lift
rivers from their beds
one drop after another up,
millions spirited heavenward
lifted in the giddiness of sunstroked days
above the drought and dead cattle
the mud and fester made
not from their leaving
but their failure
to return.
And in your long absense too
you can paralyze the flow,
ice the brooks,
freeze stone
banks.
You can also return late,
stay too long,
appear surprised,
come to tempt
or disappoint.
This we know,
we who eat what will grow,
rise and sleep, and leave
just once.

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Spring Skiing

When we take the downhill runs into account,
the world of avalanche and thaw, the shifts
in altitude, patterns that trace them down
and lifts that transcend,
our sense of place
changes instantly
into our senses
of places
the myth
of terra
firma
falls
to.
But so much is grounded in that myth
of the solid place to which all
that falls must return,
so much depends upon
a ready acceptance
of the base.
Who after all learns to live in a world
without foundations or learns
to suspend himself or her?
If fish once left the sea
to be men and women
it was this myth
they took on,
forgetting
fluidity.
It was the price
in faith they paid
to have an interplay
of light and darkness,
clarity of line, a sense
of distance and a glimpse of stars:
the fringe rewards of living
in a less dense element.

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Two Poems by John Peck

King David

That far rise drifting in its first mute buds
Brightens and freezes through binoculars,
Shadeless grain of the giver. As if grown
From goldweed to be yours—

Sprays of some pale infinitesimal
Erect, detained. Breathing comes differently
As I grasp them. And blackbirds, unheard,
Claiming them nervously.

And there shall come before him to stand naked
Bathsheba, and the network of her veins
Shall noose for his gathering at her collarbone,
The map of her compliance.

Simple enlargement breeding density
In space, eagle's iris, apocalypse
Without a sound. . . or giving to the hand
The eye's power, perhaps,

For on that day he will have sent the husband
Promoted to the front lines, a speck, a mote.
One tapestry crowds all toward the foreground,
Pressing toward the foot

Of the high stair on which Uriah kneels,
Breveted by the sword of David. Smooth
To its white underweave goes that stone, worn
By the loyal knee smooth.

Blown birches, cadences, resume themselves
Cool there. Dumbly my hand warms to extort
Their virtue, their renewal, to command
Freshness in every part.

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But that comes as it will, green into green.
Genie of unconcealment, augurer—
The foot entering the boat entering
The river meets it there,

Balancing in the new element, bought
With living weight in the expected meeting
Made unexpected. And that tone may change
Air steadies, shuddering,

Blue harbor of the air where the dragonfly
Stitches red, mating where the sedge roots muddy,
That pair dipping in loops to strike the water.
Ripples spring from each body.

And will joy carry fear, and will that fear
Bear a strange gladness still? Granting that world
Grants a world doubled, the tyrant's irises
Valve wide in half-light, cold.

She waits. And I compose the doubled figure:
Walking into his country I am left
Curved on his eye, bent with sleep's ambivalent
Promise, the sentry's gift.

And stirring I shall turn like young Hardy
Remembering there was to be a hanging
That morning, three miles off in Dorchester,
And reach still groggy, stinging,

For a brass telescope. And as I place
That disc of altered space against my sight,
The white figure will drop and the town clock
Strike the hour's faint note.

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Jonathan

Cancerous sun that uncurls, then
Eddies upon itself,
Light that pillages the eyes: is it
Flood or filament?

Foremost in slaughter, Jonathan
Dipped his lance
Idly into a stray honeycomb
And tasted of it.

Bubbles from sandbars in shallows,
Waterbug flopping
Over the pondface, his walnut shadow
Detonating in silt—

Back, and then back along amber current
As if I were still intent
By that bridge rail, fluid there within
My detachment.

From a source, that flow ever newer, and yet
At the same fixed distance.
And that is a place that I would not
Leave easily,

Though the alders, burnished and pooled there
In a fierce leafiness,
Bring me to weep inexplicably
And without bitterness.

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Pressure in the grip thus easing,
And bronze aim nestled
In a spear's trench, figure within figure,
I would have rested.

For at every chance he had struck
Head from body,
The same music had welled in him,
His time repeatedly

Returning upon him. Hours, drowsing
Day of the brief lung,
May hear illness, another speech,
Moving toward song

As toward a dire antecedent, and follow
Over the grooved threshold,
One speed, many waters. He tasted of it
And his eyes were enlightened.

Back, and still farther along the bright margin,
Dissolving until that stream
Is neither water nor motion, and one is
Not yet among them.

The lifted forearm of even that man
May wait upon this, may yet
Forget the drone homing, the crow's eye
Poised over wheat.

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Joyce E. Peseroff

April to May

1.
It is cold enough for rain
to coagulate & fall in heavy drops.
Tonight a skin of ice will grow
over the bones of the smallest bush,

making it droop like the wrist
of someone carrying a heavy suitcase. This moving on,
from season to season, is exhausting
& violent, the break from the Berlin Wall

of winter especially. Like a frostbitten
hand coming to life, I color
first with warmth,
then with pain. Thawing, letting

the great powers go
their own way, in rivers & in flesh,
frightens me, as this day
warns me of an icy night.

2.
Each year I am astonished
at the havoc we have wrought
on other lives: fathers
made tiny by cancer, a mother

swollen around a bad heart
"brought on by aggravation."
To suffer is to do something new
yet always the same—

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a change of life
from the sexual dread. Some women
wish they were men, some men
wish they were dead; still,

there is coin in suffering.
Suffering makes us
rich as Croesus in his golden tears,
& we are rarely hated for it.

This coin I store in a purse
made of mother's milk
& flesh, which God says I must not mix.
I use it to seek pleasure.

3.
Walking around with this thing in me
all day, this loving cup
full of jelly, waiting for you
to come home—seven o'clock,

eight o'clock, eight-thirty.
What could be more important
than love? I can't imagine; you can.
Not a good day, not about to get better.

4.
The bird comes complete
with heart, liver, & neck-bone
wrapped chastely in white paper.
Still half-frozen,

the legs are hard to separate.
Inside, wax paper sticks to the ribs.
I reach like a vet delivering pigs
or a boy finger-fucking a virgin.

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5.
Air the same sweet
temperature inside the house
as outside the house.
Stepping up from the cellar

with an armful of sheets
I listen for the dirge of flies
under the chittering birds, both
painfully loud. There is a stridency

that's stubborn in a life
grown by inches: the fat
little fingers of buds bursting,
ugly ducklings, the slow war

of day against night.
As I pin the swelling sheets
with clothespins damp & too
narrow at the mouth, I wonder how

flies know to come out
to feed the birds, & feast themselves
on the new stillborn, this stubborn
great chain of being. . .

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from Fantasies and Prejudices

Peter Handke

March 24

A book written so hectically one can't help thinking that the author was trying to hide something

Animated cartoon: a unicorn in a tree top, mourning his lost love. It brings tears to my eyes

I evaded evil with my body, though it came from my body

A successful breath

Dying in an auto tunnel (I felt my body expanding)

There was a vase of forsythia in the center of the table. I propped my elbows on the table and saw that the flowers trembled with my heartbeat. When the others propped their elbows on the table, the forsythia didn't stir

In my fear of death I begged her to stay, but she scented death and fled

If only this booming, deafening fear of death would become

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a silent bodily pain, as it was just a moment ago! (I can't hear myself any more)

The cold telephone

What looks to me like a malignant glitter of machines in among the people in the park is baby carriages

I notice that in my mortal fear I move with upraised hands and outthrust behind, like some kind of homosexual

To think, even while zipping a zipper, that this will be the death blow

"Oh stay a while," I said smiling. "I'm rather frightened"

A bus passes, with the yellow evening sky in its rear window: "It doesn't do anything for me anymore"

And then I washed all the dishes, so nothing unclean would remain. (I write about myself in the past tense)

Perhaps this mortal fear, in which everything, even a grain of rice stuck to the bottom of the pot, the squeak of a cork, etc., wants to give me the death blow, is only there to teach me control—and yet when that feeble-minded couple was here a while ago and I felt obliged to give my full attention to listening to what they said and understanding what they are, my condition grew even worse. I had thought I could escape into the perception of others, and saw that that was just what made me sick.

And yet I fought against death all day, quietly, attentively, craftily

At the worst moment I wanted to buy newspapers, to pretend to be living a normal day

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To stand up and walk—happiness!

Still stirrings and twinges of pain in my bones despite my almost anaesthetic drunkenness

March 25

Woke up in the dark. Panic. Slipped on a coat over my pajamas and went out into the street; a bird is piping; sounds like a man calling his dog (5 a.m.)

The small narrow world of a frightened man

I walked rapidly through the streets. A bus passed and I distinguished passengers in the dark; the inside of the bus wasn't lit yet

Cats on garbage heaps

From a cellar the roar of a furnace

Not many lights on; those mostly in attic rooms

Wet bundles of newspapers beside the lighted but deserted bus stops

Clouds of smoke from a chimney, though it's still deep night

Rain on my eyeballs, cool and soothing

A little while ago, (evening), for the first time in ever so long —while standing at the kitchen sink eating grapes and spitting the seeds into my hand—I managed to think of a future

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March 26

They laid me down on a blanket and folded it over me

Lying feet foremost in the ambulance, in a traffic jam on the motorway. The sun was very hot and there was no need for me to be lying down; they made me

In the hospital. When I asked the doctor if I could go home the next day, she said: "It's within the realm of possibility"

I've started talking to myself again, if only inwardly. Good sign?

March 27

I sensed that the doctor would want to shake hands with me before leaving, so I held my hands in the draft to keep them from sweating

Doctors are always saying "a little," "just a little": Did you spit a little blood again?" "Your blood pressure has gone up just a little"

March 28

I keep frantically cleaning my fingernails

The *"Alarme"* button of the electrocardiograph flickers as if it were going to light up; the *"Seuil"* (Threshold) button has stopped blinking and just keeps flickering. It's Sunday, and I've set my watch an hour ahead for summer time. I'm alone with the machine

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It's been light for quite some time, planes have been roaring past for hours. Condensed water vapor is dripping down the inside of the mineral water bottle, the flowers have been given fresh water, the sun has been shining into the room for sometime—but it seems to me that the night is just ending

During the night a woman kept letting out short screams in the corridor (or maybe it was the squeaky wheels of a bed being moved): someone is weeping and dying

The other patients cough at least, they have something else the matter with them

Last night in a dream I saw a tree lit by the first sun (as though sprinkled with light)—so intense, as I slept, was my longing for day to come

As the young doctors out in the observation room were looking at my electrocardiogram, the nurse stood up and began to sing; her purpose, I feared was to shut my room door without my noticing, so I wouldn't hear what the doctors were saying

"Relax!" (But how?)

What do I do in my moment of panic? I raise my hand and straighten my glasses

The West Indian who hands out bread before meals has shed his skin twice a year since he's been in Europe

With all this peace and quiet, this drowsiness in the afternoon, I have a feeling that someone is lurking somewhere like a spider: ready to rush to my help

The patient who was just brought to the recovery room is squeezing a blue handkerchief in both fists

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"Ne respirez plus, Monsieur!"

An hour immobilized by fear

The wasted out-of-doors!

The old man, helpless against the sadness of parting, pinched himself furiously in the leg when he saw his wife in tears, looking in at him through the little window

Now I feel really sick, but only with the fear that's been put into me here

He's an Armenian but he says he feels French, because he fought in the French army

Headline in the paper: Twenty-year-old dies of heart attack. Relieved to see it was a horse

The rising airplane reflected in the electrocardiogram screen

I shut my eyes, but fear opens them

I hear the dog barking in the evening outside; I *am able* to listen! (Happiness)

I don't feel at home in illness (as so many others do)

March 29

A train at daybreak—: the sound seems to issue from the rising dawn; and then the distant roar of the train, the rattling of individual cars, and for a moment a little squeaking sound; how beautiful the dawn is today; for a few moments the train rattles as though crossing a small bridge

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Now that I've got through the night it's almost beautiful to hear my neighbor's snoring and gurgling in his belly

If I count my heartbeats more slowly than they occur, they *become* slower

The young nurse gives me a violent rubdown for fear the movement of her hands on my back will feel like a caress

I become an empty *cavern* when the tension of my fear goes out of me

"You are entitled to one gram of salt a day!" And the nurse shook the little packet in front of the patient, as though she thought he had lost his power to understand the spoken language

The electrodes cling almost lovingly to my chest

In reading Kafka's *Journal,* I find that his complaints and self-recriminations no longer interest me, but only his descriptions

In the two months of his stay here the old man has begun to act like a schoolboy; for instance, he raises both hands when asked if he wants bread and answers in the croaking voice of a first-grader

Reading Kafka: no need to remember his actual words (you can forget them right away, that's the fine thing about them); they remain present all the same, even if you forget them

While I was reading a book, the old man in the other bed was reading the label on a mineral water bottle, turning the bottle, turning the bottle around and around

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The image of rolling pebbles on the bottom of a clear brook, and in my head the words: "The minds of the dead roll with the pebbles in the brook"

("I should have to search for a year to find a true feeling inside me" K.)

What I refuse to put up with: people referring to me as "he" in my presence

The old man wants his slippers put down at his bedside "in the right direction," so he can step right into them

March 30

I've already begun to think: "We invalids"

In the bright room the shadows of birds darting by

When the old man asks a question, the nurse answers by repeating his question in a slight singsong: The patient: "Is the tube fastened?"—The nurse (in a singsong): "The tube is fas-tened"

He calls out something to the nurse as she is leaving, but she doesn't hear him; the cry that escapes him makes me think of a hunter who has missed his aim

Occasionally the long-time patient speaks to the nurses in an undertone, as if they had secrets together

The elderly patient is caressing the nurse's finger*nail*

My taking notes in front of them doesn't affect their behavior in the least. (Maybe a writer, like a policeman, should wear a uniform, so people can watch their step in his presence)

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The old man says to himself: *''Mon pauvre ami!''*

When an idiot leaves the room, we don't talk about him, but resolve with a silent gesture to forget him

I must get used to moving slowly for the rest of my life

The old man asked me: ''These books you write—are they taken from life or out of the air?''—''Both,'' I said

The old man is leaving the hospital; his hat is lying ready, with his wife's knitting beside it; all through his illness she has spent the visiting hours silently knitting at his bedside

Before being carted out in a wheel chair, the old man put on the wide gray-on-gray checked loden coat he bought more than twenty years ago in a shop that no longer exists; his plastic bag, half full of urine, hung down below his coat. With tears in his eyes, he waved good-by to me, then they wheeled him out to the elevator; when he got home, he'd go to bed and sleep

Suppose I had to write a story that would not seem absurd to someone tied hand and foot, gagged, and shut up in a clothes cupboard

New colors in the room: the patient they've just brought in has a rust-brown operation scar on his chest, and there's a greenish-yellow sachet of lavender on top of his linen pile

Barely settled, he's busy marking the menu for a whole week ahead

My first fear of the day; not bad, it's already late afternoon; I must try to delay this fear a little longer each day!

I believe that my eyes lit up once today

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What would I do without the movements of the planes outside! John Cowper Powys, sometimes the machines you curse *are* of some use to a man's soul

Years of pain have taught the new patient in my room to lie as still as a mouse; he never turns over in bed

My skin is still sticky where the electrodes were placed

March 31

I don't dare wish my neighbor a good morning; maybe he's in pain

The bedridden man is beginning to confuse the shapes of things; in the thorns of roses, for example, he sees parrot beaks

My new roommate gives me the feeling that I've changed rooms

The patient beside me wants a haircut—never in all his life has his hair been so long

I'm already curious about my roommate's wife

This patient breathes as if he were blowing into an empty bottle

The cosmic-blue sky

Suppose that, after thinking all the possibilities through, I reverted to the words of song hits

Wanting to assault the flowers—with both hands

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Smoke between the pines in the distance; their trunks are very dark in contrast to the light-colored trunks of the deciduous trees; it's so lovely outside, so all-pervadingly peaceful; the smoke makes the pines look even darker; the long hedge shines as if it alone were wet in the whole still, sunny landscape; even the flashing hoods of the cars emanate a kind of American peace; in the fork of tree a tiny piece of silver paper flashes stupendously; the freshly sawed branch stumps shine as if that were the only thing to do—all so fearless that even the birds go strolling about on the ground, in the grass, instead of flying (fable of the bird who wished it could walk on the earth, just as men long to fly). And suddenly, looking out on this paradisiacal landscape, I think: *rockslide*

Lying there with my eyes closed, I deliberately thrust out my lower lip, so as not to look like a corpse in my mind

Suddenly, while dozing, a sensation as if a cat had jumped up on the bed

What a loss if I hadn't seen that advertisement on TV! (My affection for advertising pictures, their familiar omnipresence, insouciance, contempt for death)

April 1

Just now for the first time I saw an airplane flying in a different direction from the one that is usually here—suddenly a faint intimation of war

Here in the hospital I ceased for a time to be anything else but "my condition," "my situation," "my circumstances"

The barber in the sickroom, the bunches of hair on the sickroom floor ("I couldn't sleep with all that hair," said the patient who has now become a customer—of the barber)

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Dismissed from the hospital on this most beautiful day of all possible days, I cannot dispel the feeling (?) that I wouldn't be missing anything if I were dead

"Outside," in the city, I discover who I am, who I have become

A woman turns away when I look at her (a mere act of perception). For a moment I feel like saying: "I'm really not doing you any harm" On this warm afternoon the women are coming out of the office buildings in coats (it was cold this morning), and I can hear them all sigh with relief; no, there are some who no longer even sigh with relief when they come out of their offices into this beauty

Shaken by the Metro again, along with everyone else

At the sight of the clasp knife, the thought that I could use it to defend myself if my own body assaulted me

April 2

The call of a blackbird in a tall poplar seems unusually loud

Back to normal: Looking through all my pockets for change again

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Portfolio

Phil / Six Images 1969-78

Chuck Close

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Phil, 1969. Synthetic polymer on canvas, 108 x 84 inches. Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

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Phil/2464, 1973. Ink and pencil on paper, 22 x 17 inches. Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

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Drawing for Phil/Rubber Stamp, 1976. Ink on paper, 7-5/8 x 6-1/2 inches. Courtesy The Pace Gallery, New York.

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Phil/Watercolor, 1977. Watercolor and acrylic on paper, 58 x 40 inches. Courtesy The Pace Gallery, New York.

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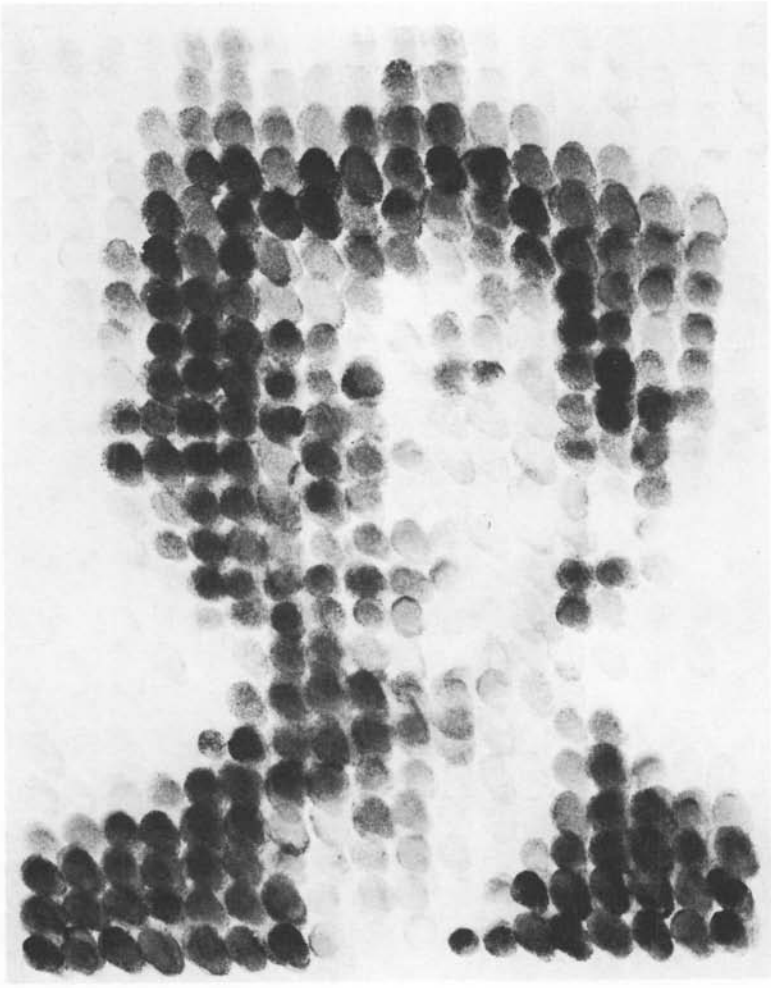

Phil/Fingerprint I, 1978. Stamp-pad ink and pencil on paper, 29-3/4 x 22-1/4 inches. Courtesty The Pace Gallery, New York.

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Phil/Fingerprint II, 1978. Stamp-pad ink and pencil on paper, 29-3/4 x 22-1/4 inches. Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

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Waiting

Andre Dubus

to Peggy

Juanita Creehan was a waitress in a piano bar near Camp Pendleton, California. She had been a widow for twelve years, and her most intense memory of her marriage was an imagined one: Patrick's death in the Chosin Reservoir. After Starkey got back from Korea, he and Mary came to her apartment, and he told Juanita how it happened: they were attacking a hill, and when they cleared it they went down to the road and heard that Patrick had caught it. Starkey went over to the second platoon to look at him.

"What did they do to him?" Juanita said.

"They wrapped him in a shelter half and put him in a truck."

She thought of the road of frozen mud and snow; she had never seen snow but now when it fell or lay white in her mind it was always death. Many nights she drank and talked with Starkey and Mary, and she asked Starkey for more details of the Reservoir, and sometimes she disliked him for being alive, or disliked Mary for having him alive. She had been

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tolerant of Mary's infidelity while Starkey was gone, for she understood her loneliness and dread; but now she could not forgive her, and often she looked quickly into Mary's eyes, and knew that her look was unforgiving. Years later, when she heard they were divorced, she was both pleased and angry. At the end of those nights of listening to Starkey, she went to bed and saw the hills and sky, and howitzers and trucks and troops on the road. She saw Patrick lying in the snow while the platoon moved up the hill; she saw them wrap him in the shelter half and lift him to the bed of the truck.

Some nights she descended further into the images. First she saw Patrick walking. He was the platoon sergeant, twenty-six years old. He walked on the side of the road, watching his troops and the hills. He had lost weight, was thinner than ever (my little Bantam rooster, she had called him), his cheeks were sunken, and on them was a thin red beard. She no longer felt her own body. She was inside his: she felt the weight of helmet and rifle and parka; the cold feet; the will to keep the body going, to believe that each step took him and his men closer to the sea. Through his green eyes and fever-warmth she looked up the road: a howitzer bounced behind a truck; Lieutenant Dobson, walking ahead on the road, wore a parka hood under his helmet; she could see none of his flesh as he looked once up at the sky. She heard boots on the hard earth, the breathing and coughing of troops, saw their breath-plumes in the air. She scanned the hills on both sides of the road, looked down at her boots moving toward the sea; glanced to her left at the files of young troops then looked to the right again, at a snow-covered hill without trees, and then her chest and belly were struck and she was suddenly ill: she felt not pain but nausea, and a sense of futility at living this long and walking this far as her body seemed to melt into the snow...

On a summer night in 1962, for the first time in her life, she woke with a man and had to remember his name. She lay beside the strange weight of his body and listened to his

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breath, then remembered who he was: Roy Hodges, a sergeant-major, who last night had talked with her when she brought his drinks, and the rest of the time he watched her, and when she went to the restroom she looked at her tan face and blond hair; near the end of the evening he asked if he could take her home; she said she had a car but he could follow her, she'd like to have a drink, and they drank vodka at her kitchen table. Now she did not want to touch him, or wake him and tell him to go. She got up, found her clothes on the floor and dressed; quietly she opened a drawer and took a sweater and put it on her shoulder like a cape. Her purse was in the kitchen. She found it in the dark, on the floor beside her chair, and went out of the apartment and crossed the cool damp grass to her car. With the windshield wipers sweeping dew, she drove down a hill and through town to the beach. She locked her purse in the car and sat on loose sand and watched the sea. Black waves broke with a white slap, then a roar. She sat huddled in the cool air.

Then she walked. To her left the sea was loud and dark, and she thought of Vicente Torrez with the pistol in his lap: a slender Mexican boy who in high school had teased her about being named Juanita, when she had no Mexican blood. Blond gringita, he called her, and his eyes looked curiously at her, as if her name were an invitation to him, but he didn't know how to answer it. Five years after high school, while she was married to Patrick, she read in the paper that he had shot himself. There was no photograph, so she read the story to know if this were the same Vicente, and she wanted it to be him. He had been a cab driver in San Diego, and had lived alone. The second and final paragraph told of the year he was graduated from the high school in San Diego, and listed his survivors: his parents, brothers, sisters. So it was Vicente, with the tight pants and teasing face and that question in his eyes: Could you be my girl? Love me? Someone she once knew had sat alone in his apartment and shot himself; yet her feeling was so close to erotic that she was frightened. Patrick came home in late afternoon and she watched through the

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window as he walked uniformed across the lawn (it was winter: he was wearing green) and when he came inside she held him and told him and then she was crying, seeing Vicente sitting in a dirty and disorderly room, sitting on the edge of his bed and reaching that moment when he wanted more than anything else not to be Vicente, and crying into Patrick's chest she said: "I wonder if he knew somebody would cry; I wonder if he wouldn't have done it; if that would have seen him through till tomorrow—" The word tomorrow stayed in her heart. She saw it in her mind, its letters printed across the black and white image of Vicente sitting on the bed with the pistol, and she loosened Patrick's tie and began to unbutton his green blouse.

She was looking out at the sea as she walked, and she stepped into a shallow pool left by the tide; the water covered her sandalled feet and was cool and she stood in it. Then she stepped out and walked on. For a year after Patrick was killed she took sleeping pills. She remembered lying in bed and waiting for the pill to work, and the first signals in her fingers, her hands: the slow-coming dullness, and she would touch her face, its skin faintly tingling, going numb, then she was aware only of the shallow sound and peaceful act of her slow breathing.

Juanita Jody Noury Creehan. Her mother had named her, given her a choice that would not change her initials if later she called herself Jody. Her mother's maiden name had been Miller. She looked up at the sky: it was clear, stars and a quarter-moon. Noury Creehan: both names from men. She stepped out of her sandals, toe against heel, toe against heel, heart beating as though unclothing for yet another man, remembering the confessions when she was in high school, remembering tenderly as if she were mother to herself as a young girl. Petting: always she called it that, whispering through lattice and veil, because that was the word the priests used in the confessional and when they came to the Saturday morning catechism classes for talks with the junior and senior girls; and the word the nuns used too on Saturday mornings,

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black-robed and looking never-petted themselves, so the word seemed strange on their tongues. The priests looked as if they had petted, or some of them did, probably only because they were men, they had hands and faces she liked to watch, voices she liked to hear.

Petting, for the bared and handled and suckled breasts, her blouse unbuttoned, and her pants off and skirt pulled up for the finger; the boys' pants on and unzipped as they gasped, thick warmth on her hand, white faint thumping on the dashboard. She confessed her own finger too, and while petting was a vague word and kept her secrets, masturbation was stark and hid nothing, exposed her in the confessional like the woman in the photograph that Ruth had shown her: a Mexican woman of about thirty, sitting naked in an arm chair, legs spread, hand on her mound, and her face caught forever in passion real or posed.

Then finally in high school it was Billy Campbell in the spring of her junior year, quick-coming Billy dropping the Trojan out of the car window, the last of her guilt dropping with it, so that after one more confession she knew she had kneeled and whispered to a priest for the last time. Young and hot and pretty, she could not imagine committing any sin that was not sexual. When she was thirty there was no one to tell that sometimes she could not bear knowing what she knew: that no one would help her, not ever again. That was the year she gained weight and changed sizes and did not replace her black dress, though she liked herself in black, liked her blond hair touching it. She began selecting colors which in the store were merely colors; but when she thought of them on her body and bed, they seemed to hold possibilities: sheets and pillowcases of yellow and pink and pale blue, and all her underwear was pastel, so she could start each day by stepping into color. Many of those days she spent at the beach, body-surfing and swimming beyond the breakers and sleeping in the sun, or walking there in cool months. Once a bartender told her that waitresses and bartenders should have a month off every year and go to a cabin in the mountains

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and not smile once. Just to relax the facial muscles, he said; maybe they go, like pitchers' arms. Her days were short, for she slept late, and her evenings long; and most days she was relieved when it was time to go to work and the costume-smile and chatter that some nights she brought home with a gentle man, and next day she had that warmth to remember as she lay on the beach.

She unbuttoned and unzipped her skirt, let it fall to the sand; pulled down her pants and stepped out of them. She took off the sweater and blouse and shivering dropped them, then reached around for the clasp of her brassière. She walked across wet sand, into the rushing touch of sea. She walked through a breaking wave, sand moving under her feet, current pulling and pushing her farther out, and she walked with it and stood breast-deep, watching the surface coming from the lighter dome of the sky. A black swell rose toward her and curled, foam skimming its crest like quick smoke; she turned to the beach, watched the wave over her shoulder: breaking it took her with head down and outstretched arms pointing, eyes open to dark and fast white foam, then she scraped sand with breasts and feet, belly and thighs, and lay breathing salt-taste as water hissed away from her legs. She stood and crossed the beach, toward her clothes.

He was sleeping. In the dark she undressed and left her clothes on the floor and took a nightgown to the bathroom. She showered and washed her hair and when she went to the bedroom he said: "Do you always get up when it's still night?"

"I couldn't sleep."

She got into bed; he placed a hand on her leg and she shifted away and he did not touch her again.

"In three months I'll be thirty-nine."

"Thirty-nine's not bad."

"I was born in the afternoon. They didn't have any others."

"What time is it?"

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"Almost five."

"It's going to be a long day."

"Not for me. I'll sleep."

"Night worker."

"They were Catholics, but they probably used something anyway. Maybe I was a diaphragm baby. I feel like one a lot of the time."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Like I sneaked into the movie and I'm waiting for the usher to come get me."

"Tell him to shove off."

"Not this usher."

"You talking about dying?"

"No."

"What then?"

"I don't know. But he's one shit of an usher."

She believed she could not sleep until he left. But when she closed her eyes she felt it coming in her legs and arms and breath, and gratefully she yielded to it: near-dreaming, she saw herself standing naked in the dark waves. One struck her breast and she wheeled slow and graceful, salt water black in her eyes and lovely in her mouth, hair touching sand as she turned then rose and floated in swift tenderness out to sea.

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WORD AND IMAGE

A Portfolio of Visual and Graphic Poetry

edited by Charles Russell

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Lucia Marcucci (Italy)

il tema romantico della poesia (poetry's romantic theme)

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Introduction

Visual poetry, sound poetry, concrete poetry, minimal art, conceptual art, performance art: the names of recent avant-garde movements direct our attention to the materials and premises of the activity of making art, and in doing so claim that only a self-reflexive art, an art fully conscious of its primary processes can be truly radical. Radical? Yes, once again, we encounter an art probing its roots and asserting, at the same time, that a new and possibly liberating vision of art and society will result. That old avant-garde impulse remains a constant presence in our culture. It has become an institution of sorts, subdued and incorporated within the established, if marginal, institutions of the literary journal, the gallery, the museum and the university. Nevertheless, no matter how anticipated and encapsulated, the continual demand for experimentation and innovation in literature and art signals some unreconciled need, on the part of artist and audience alike, to reject the conventional means of expression and behavior in this society and to seek other forms of articulation which might lead to new perceptions, new awareness of oneself and ultimately of one's culture.

The works in this portfolio indicate but one direction of contemporary literary innovation. In general, they investigate the visual dimension of literary and social language, in some cases, juxtaposing visual images and linguistic texts, in others, playing with the graphics of the letter, word, or lan-

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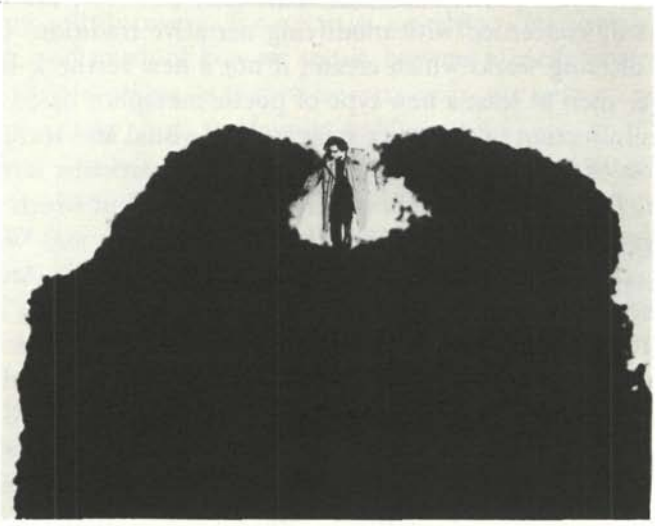
Alain Arias-Misson (United States)



Narrative Series on a News Item on the Arab-Israeli Conflict

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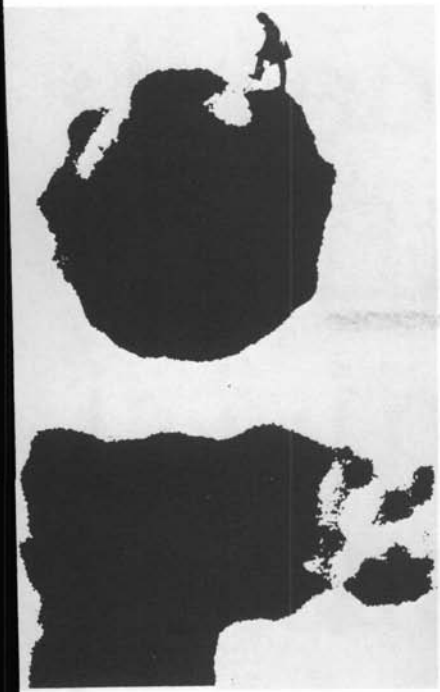

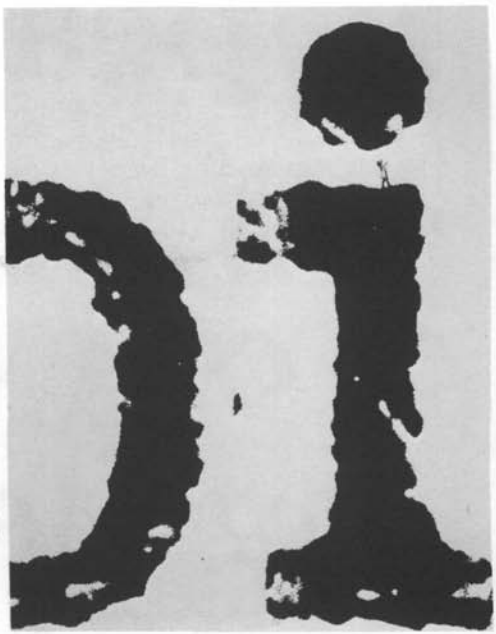

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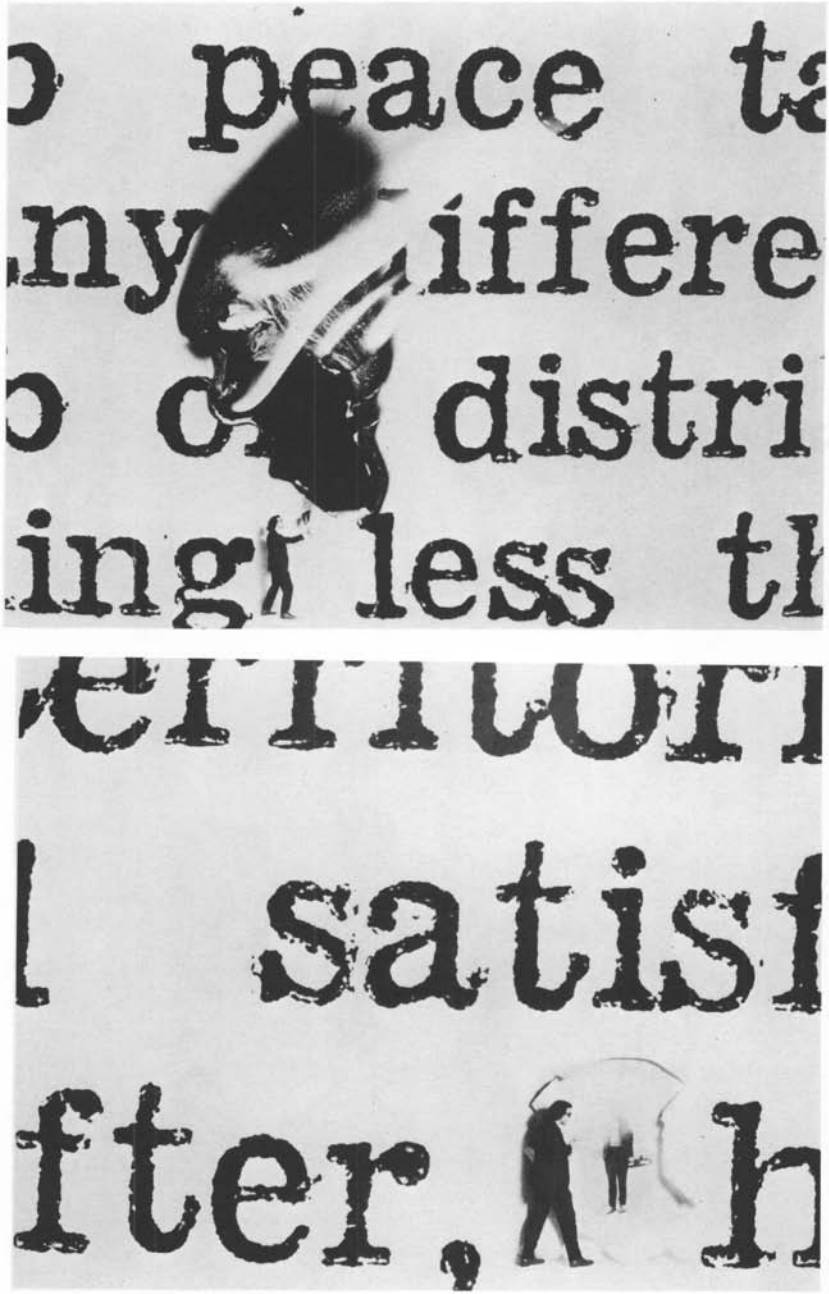

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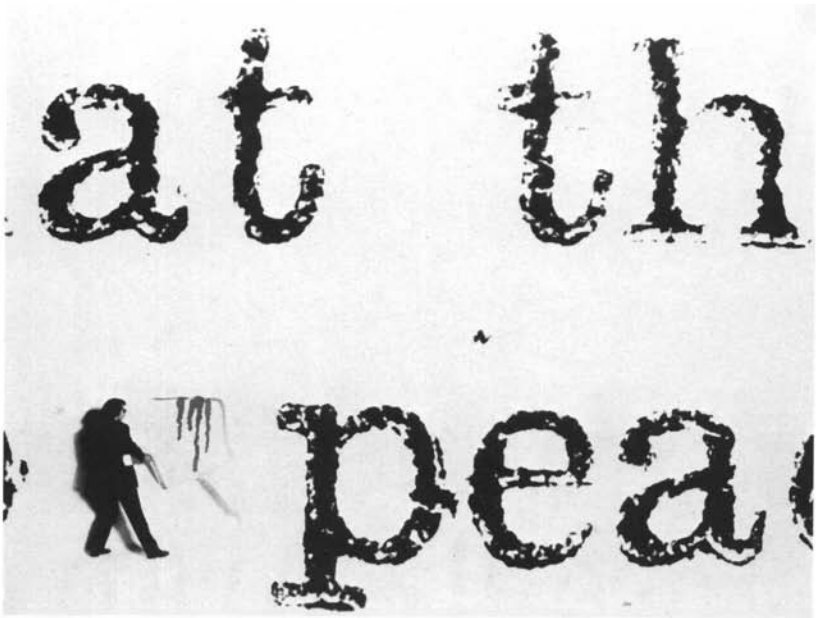

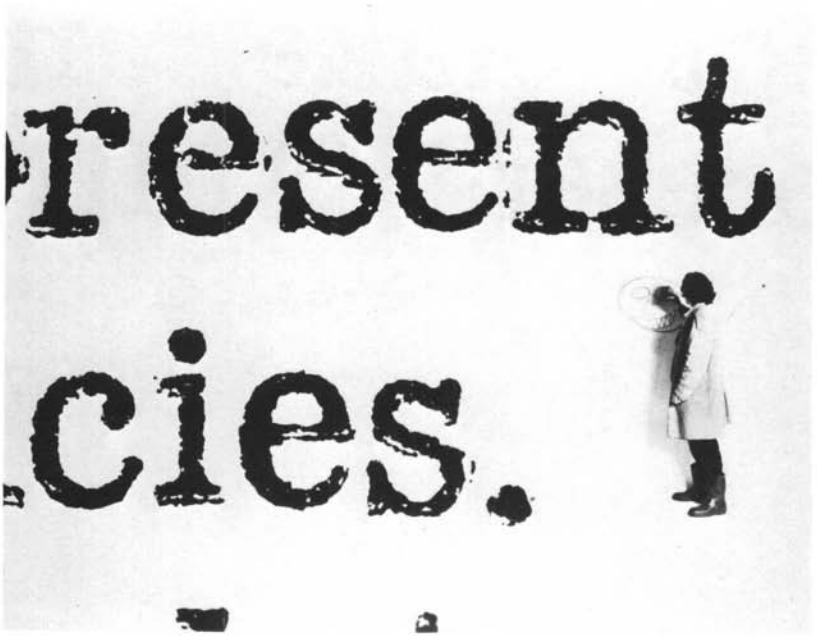

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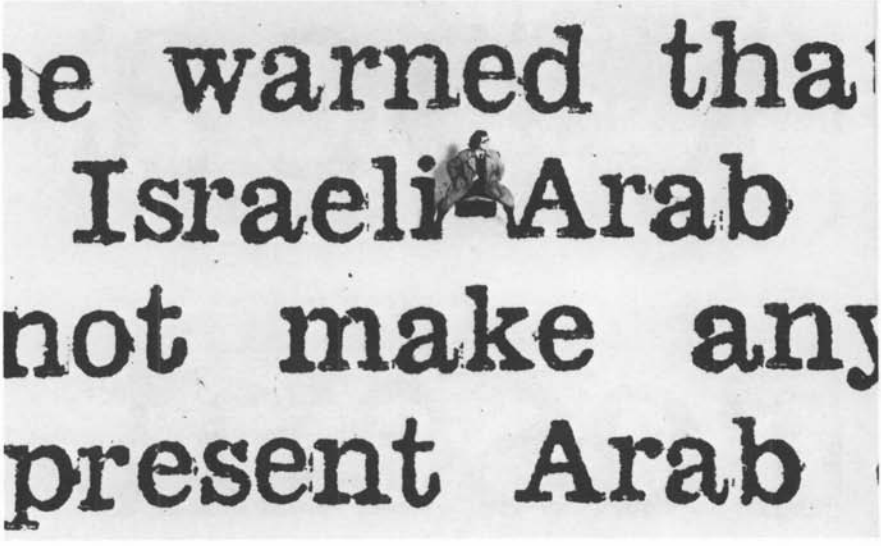

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ritories.

But he warned that coming Israeli-Arab pe would not make any to the present Arab oi tion policies. Nothing the complete evacuatic Palestinian territories Israelis would satisfy said. Thereafter, he permanent peace treat the Arabs and Israel sible.

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Shimizo Toshihiko (Japan)

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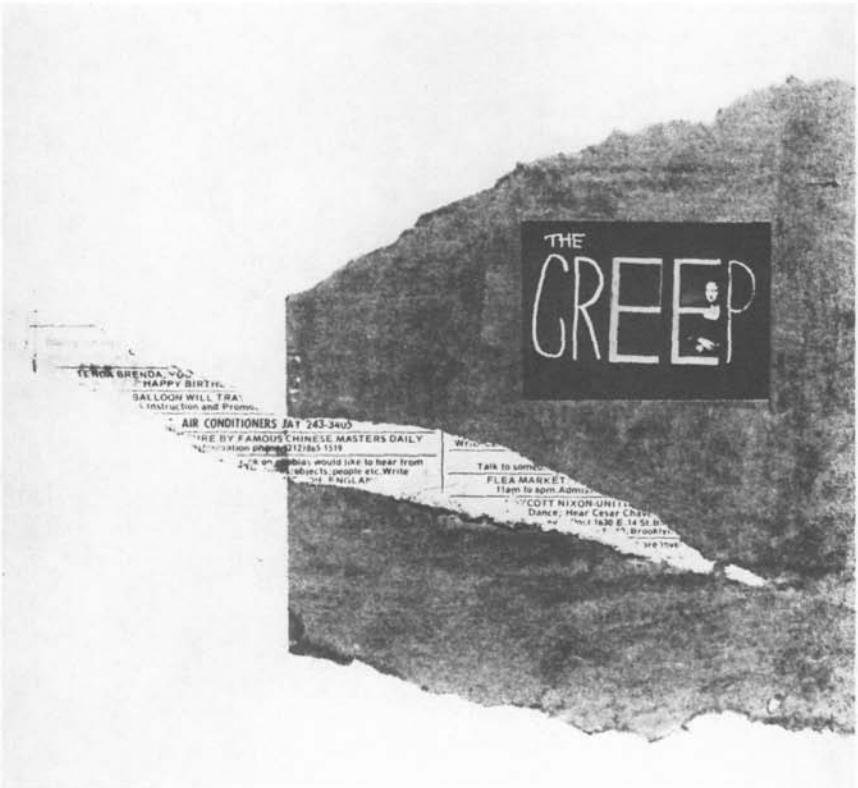

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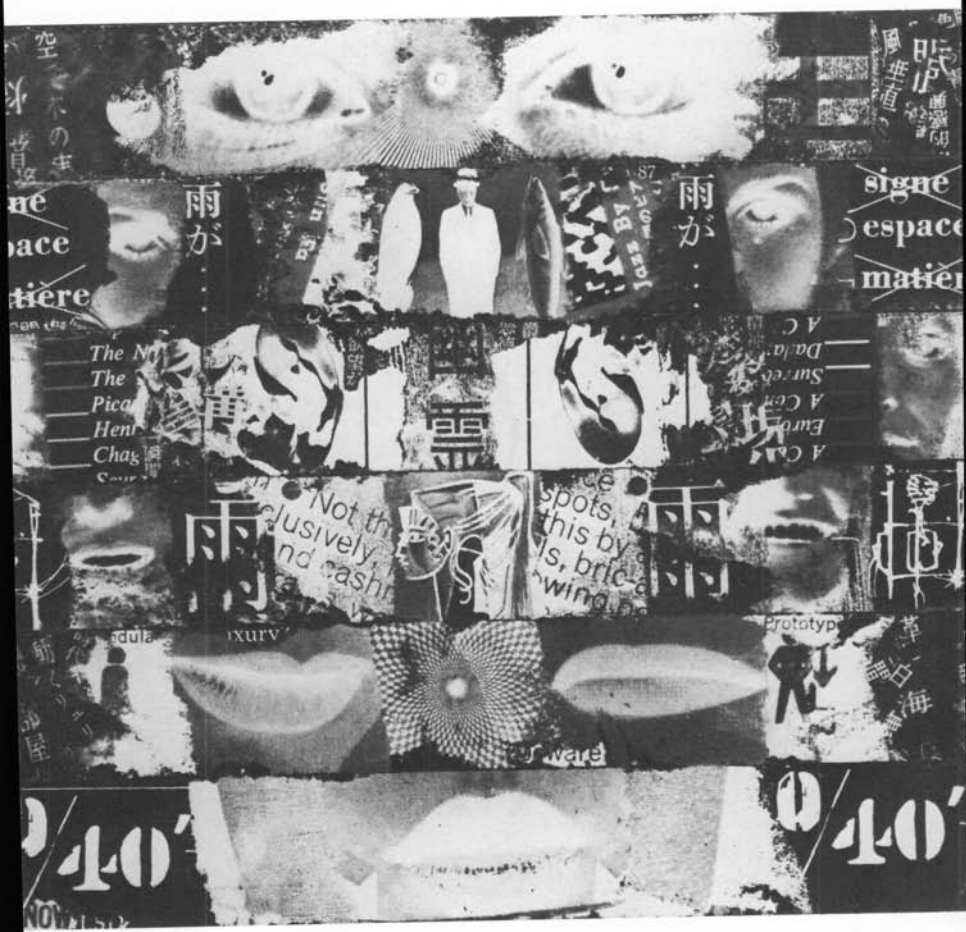

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Alain Arias-Misson: Visual Poetry

The world, original, adamic, God-made is mediated by language (culture) or, the world *is* language (man-made). The word-as-language was sufficiently spacious, fictitious, to allow people elbow-room, to walk about and admire the view, to look *out,* to imagine other worlds.

Gradually the world has been saturated with the technological production of language (texts), the atmosphere condensed, making it increasingly difficult to distinguish forms and events "in here" from those "out there." Then in a burst of acceleration in recent decades, it hardened into a surface of photo-imagery.

The photo-image has become the dominant, as well as the dominating, mode of mass communication. Whereas the text is always a fragmented space because it is "narrative" in its course through time, the photo-image is totalizing: frozen, configuring; it is the very image of the totalitarian order. It is a hardened crystal of *time,* not in time: instantaneous as act of production; as product; content; an arrested instant of life. The politics of the photo-image are paralysis and impotency, exclusive and conservative—regardless of content, by virtue of the structure as medium.

Visual poetry is a poetic strategy for dealing with the language stasis of the photo-world.

Visual poetry: the surgical ingrafting of the word into the image occurs in two phases—physical manipulation of the photo-surface (rupture) and textual *labelling* of the intervention.

Disruption of the photo-surface implodes its neutrality—exposes the photo as artifact, medium, instead of an ersatz-reality. The ontological permanence of the photo-image, its absolute surface, is shattered, its pseudo-articulations (a dumb mechanics) undone by the physical disturbance.

This handling of the surface material dislocates the significance of the photo: a different syntax is introduced in the visual space of the photo; semantic events are suggested.

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Lucia Marcucci: On Her Visual Poetry

Visual poetry is a new form of language sprung from the media's massive incitements to consumption, from the many constraints of our capitalist society, from the accumulated information with which we are bombarded and enslaved ceaselessly through imposed forms and habits. The creation of this new language which has reappropriated magmatic, alienating models to oppose them, to carry out a guerilla action around, within and against them, has made it possible to resume a critical awareness of reality through a political operation.

My work began with the manipulation of slogans and images collected from posters and publicity, making counter-manifestos in the style of wall-posters, writing exclamations on newspaper pages, borrowed from the speech-balloons of cartoons. Female images are often used in my work, with a change of "sign" calculated to irritate the habitual voyeur, accustomed to assuming the reproduction of women's images as a consumption of *beauty*. I continued this operation by next using the images of classical sculpture, corroded and almost decayed by time, or gothic carvings eaten away, apposing an ironic phrase to decontextualize the image and create an unexpected message.

Then I moved on to collage, using the imprint of the female body and writing: the imprint as fetish or as myth of the world of impurity and/or of technological purity; the application of writing as a revival of an improper poetry, contaminated and compromised with the "memories" of a given and acquired culture. The imprint of the body is an expression of unease, anxiety and discomfort with the natural, material encumbrance we possess and have to move about and put everywhere. The bodily presence of the artist in the political context of the mass of the public: its raw, uncultivated testimony as such, with regard to the cultural constructions of its surrounding environment. The body and the arches of triumph, the body and the skyscraper, the body and the book, the body and sculpture, the body and the photograph of the body, the body and the hero, the body and the modified landscape of the "cultural animal": man and technology.

The message is formulated through a new codex, through the iteration of elements which must coexist: matter, imagination and technology. Hence the works of visual poetry do not proceed from literature or from painting, but as an autonomous art out of the conflict of man with the mass media.

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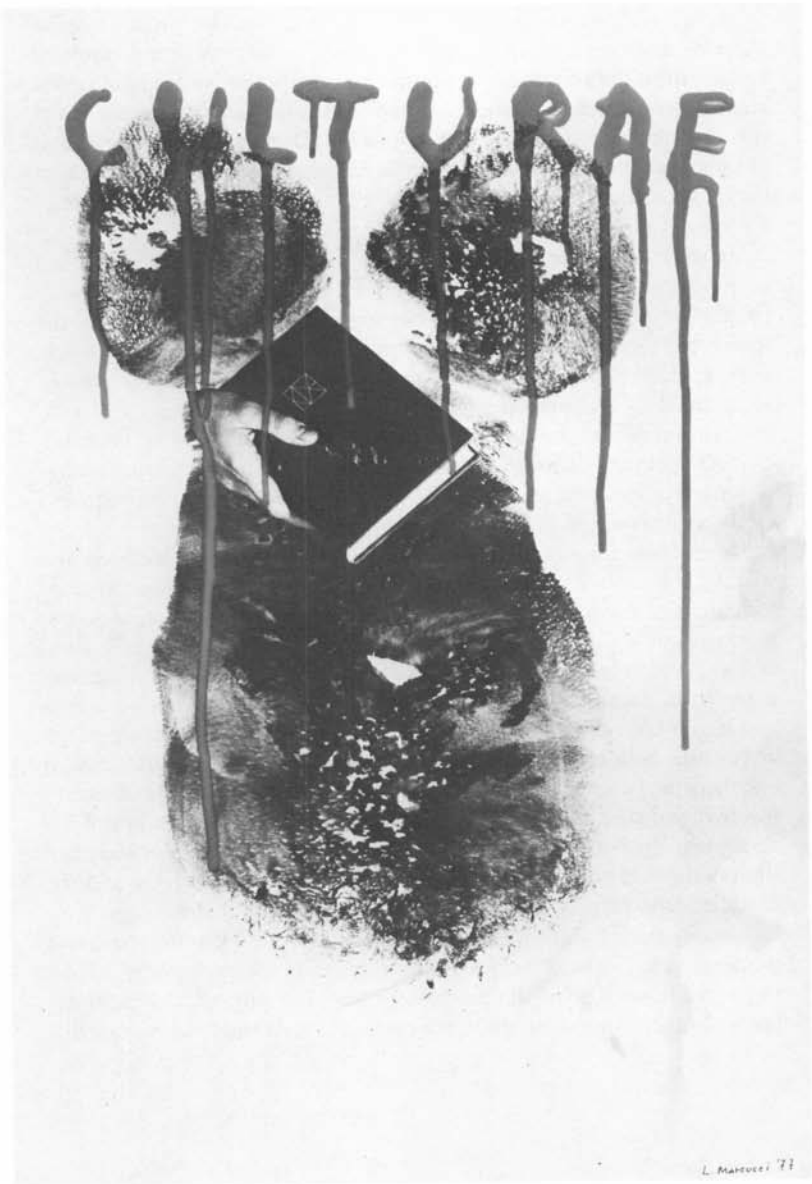
Lucia Marcucci



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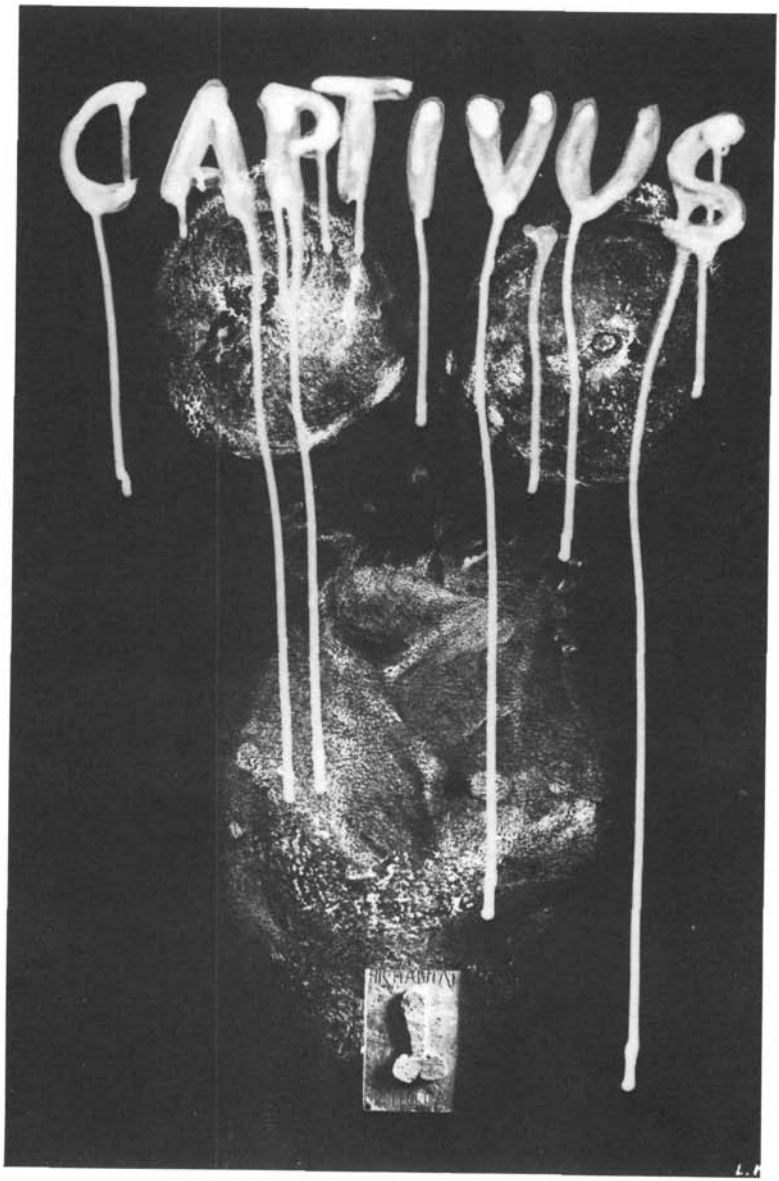

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a questa carta folle e la sua muta letteratura
a questa nostra rinuncia con il silenzio del tuo viso
forte per ritrovarne bianca
grazia

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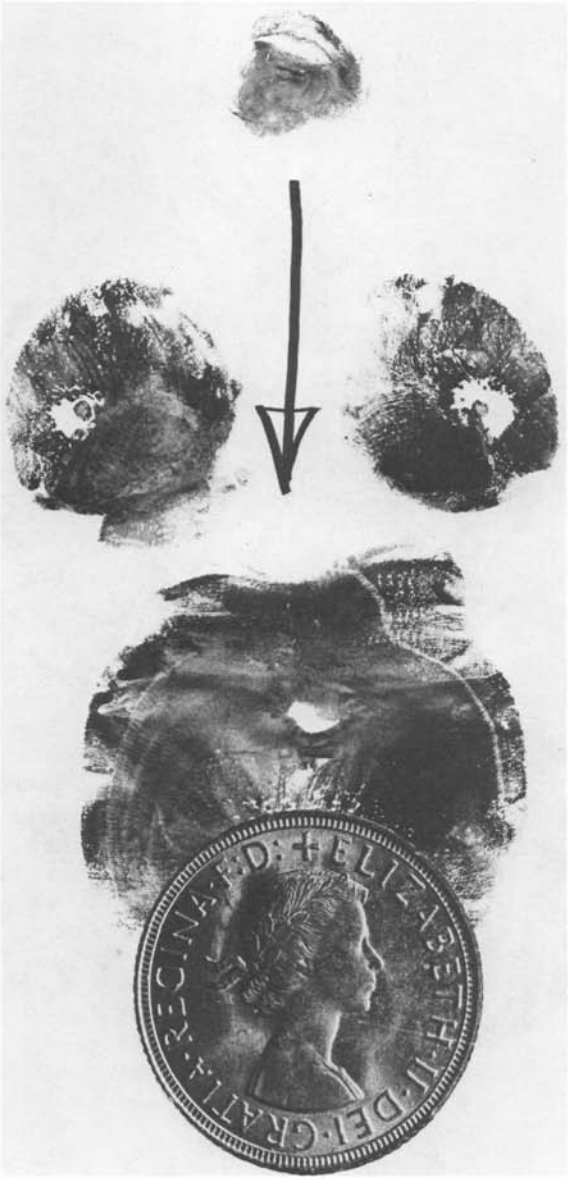

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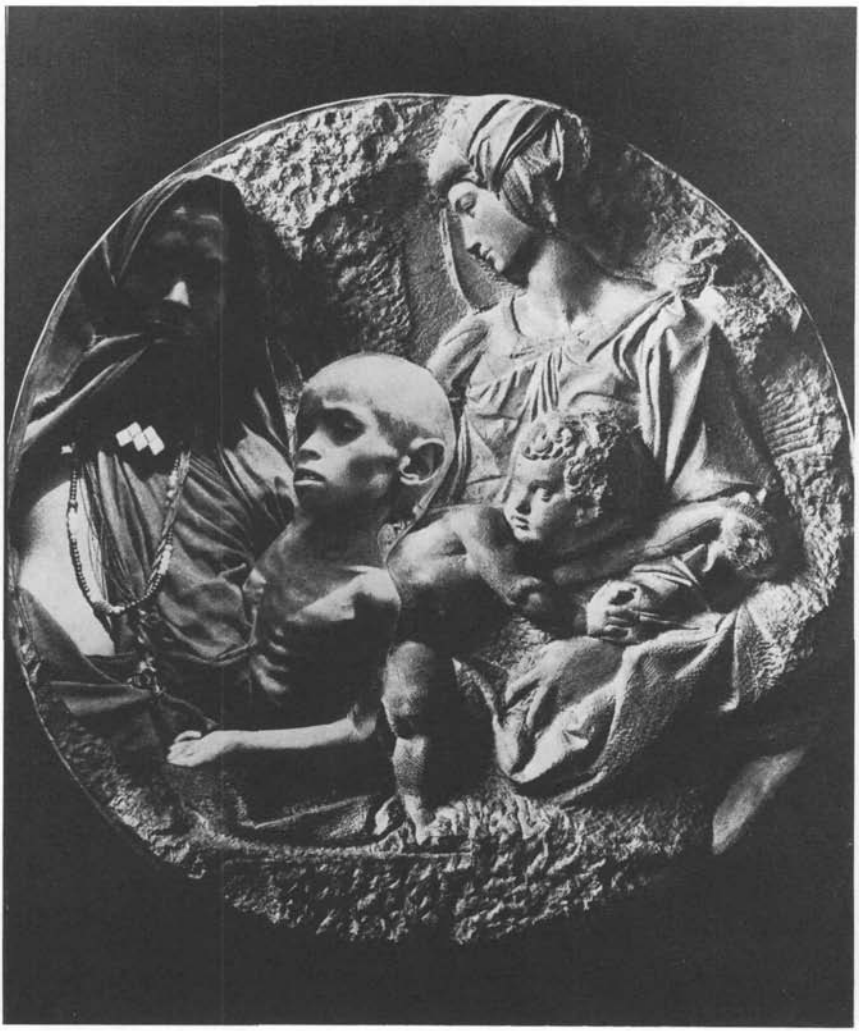
Paul de Vree (Belgium)



Anniversary Date of Rubens

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cavacalta cristina

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HOOLIGANS, LOOK OUT, BABYLON

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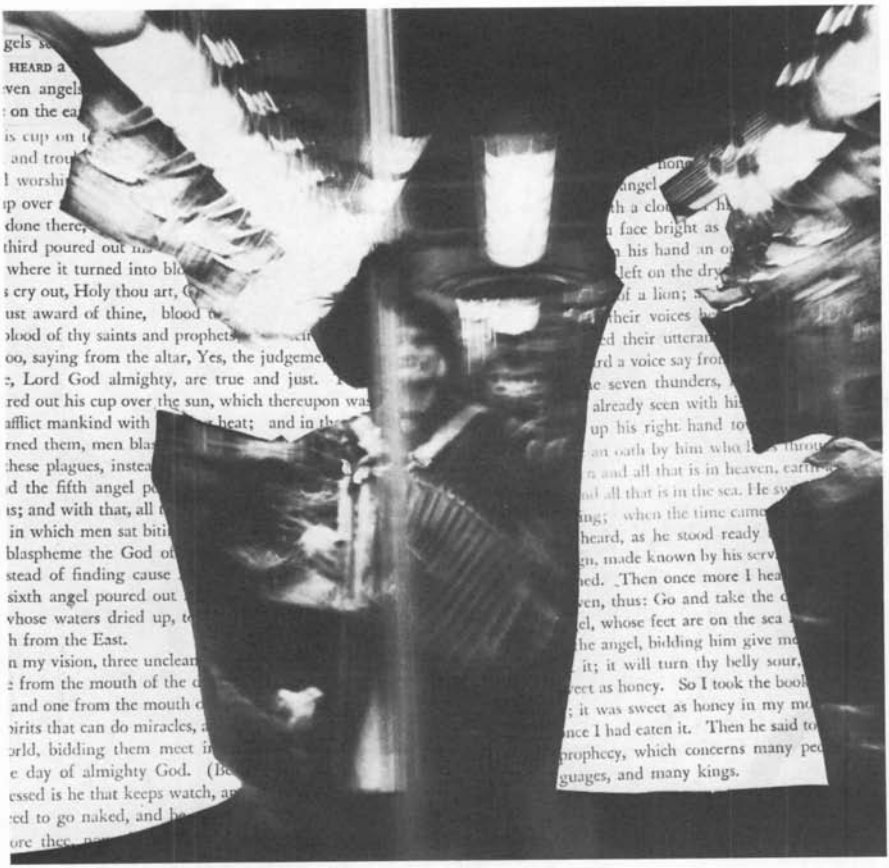
Alain Arias-Misson


HEARD a
done there,
where it turned into bl
cry out, Holy thou art,
ust award of thine, blood
blood of thy saints and prophets
oo, saying from the altar, Yes, the judgeme
, Lord God almighty, are true and just.
red out his cup over the sun, which thereupon wa
afflict mankind with
rned them, men bla
hese plagues, instea
d the fifth angel p
is; and with that, all
in which men sat biti
blaspheme the God o
stead of finding cause
sixth angel poured out
whose waters dried up,
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n my vision, three unclea
from the mouth of the d
and one from the mouth
pirits that can do miracles,
orld, bidding them meet i
e day of almighty God. (B
essed is he that keeps watch, a
ed to go naked, and h
ore thee
angel
face bright as
his hand an o
left on the dry
of a lion;
their voices
d their utteran
rd a voice say fro
e seven thunders,
already seen with hi
up his right hand to
an oath by him who l
n and all that is in heaven, earth
nd all that is in the sea. He sw
ing; when the time came
heard, as he stood ready
gn, made known by his serv
ed. Then once more I hea
ven, thus: Go and take the
el, whose feet are on the sea
he angel, bidding him give m
it; it will turn thy belly sour,
eet as honey. So I took the book
; it was sweet as honey in my m
nce I had eaten it. Then he said to
prophecy, which concerns many pe
guages, and many kings.

Apocalypse

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Obituaries

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chapeau

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God

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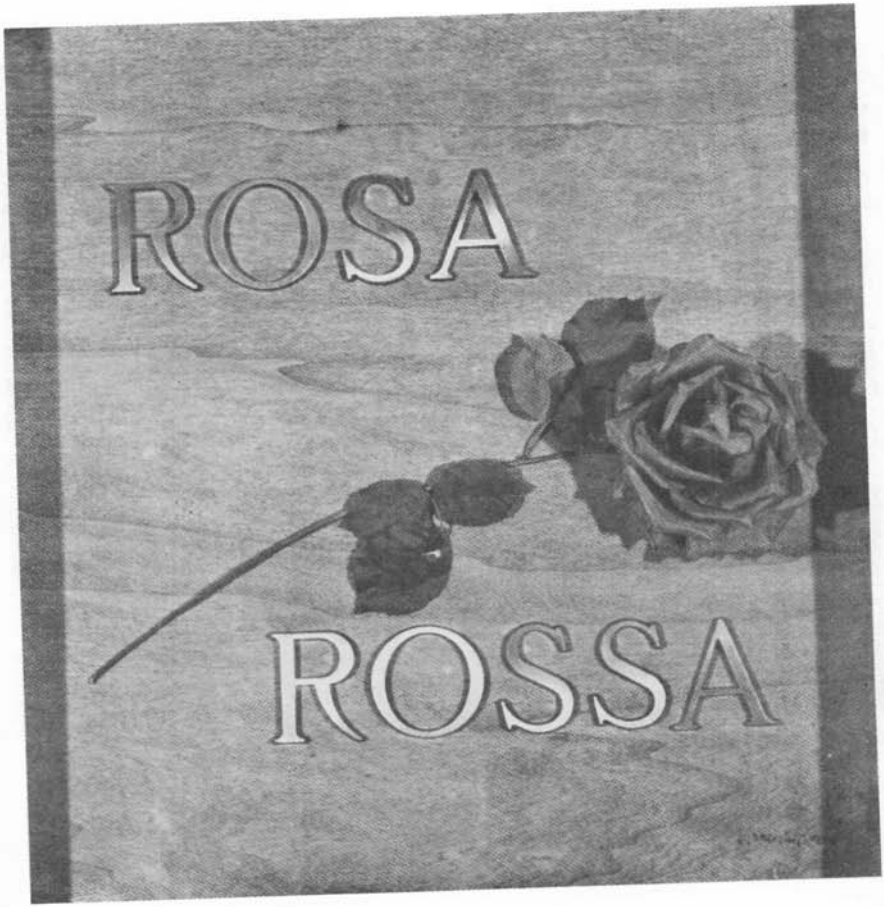
Eugenio Miccini (Italy)



Rosa Rossa

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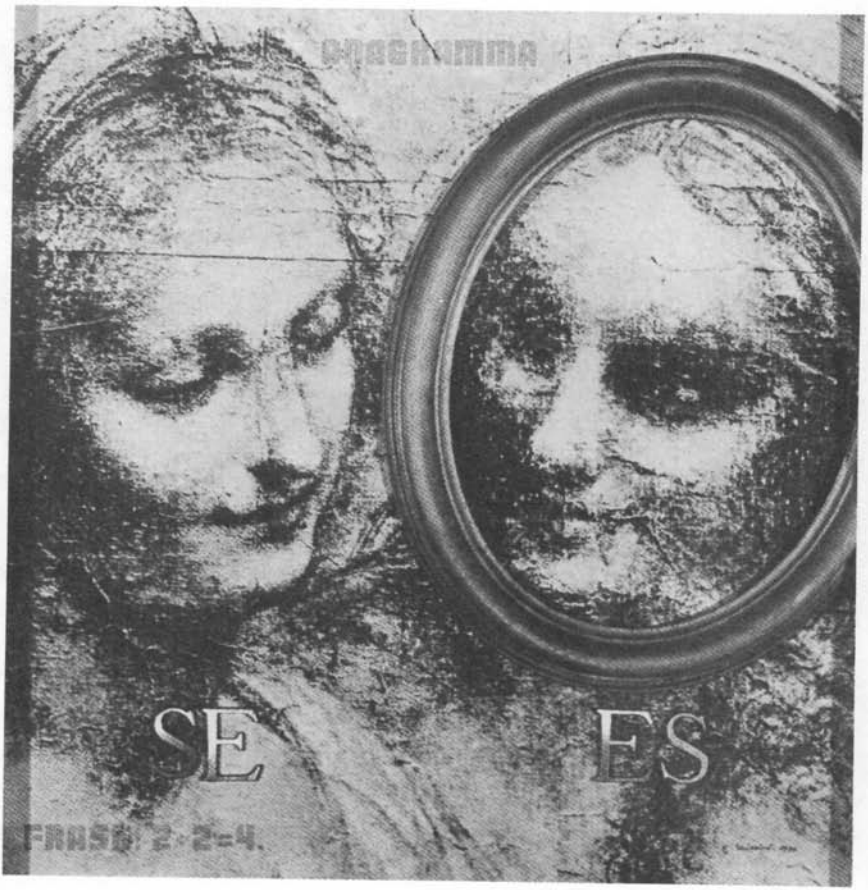

esse

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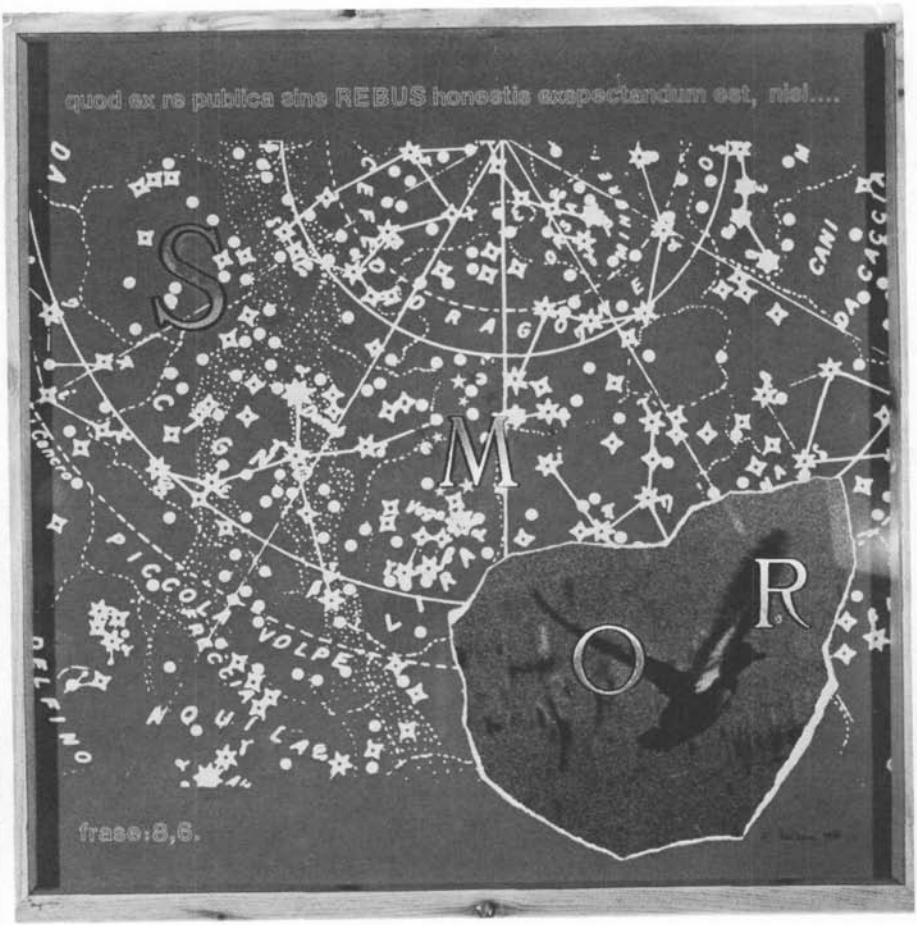

Smor

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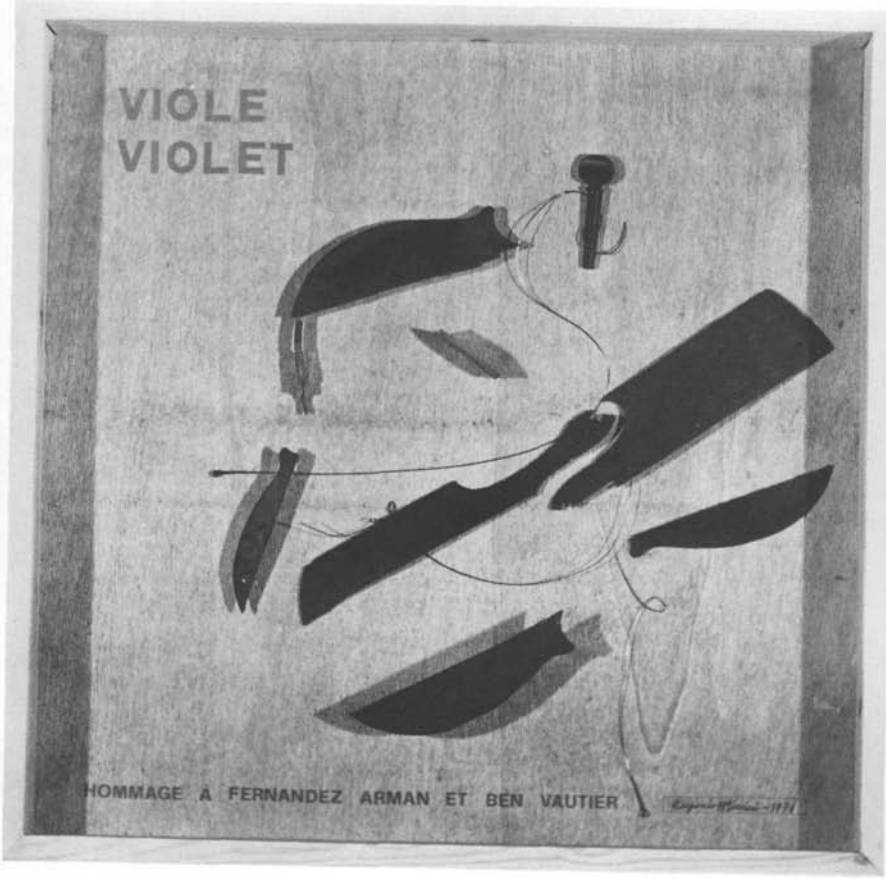

Viole Violet

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Alain Arias-Misson: A Visual Poetics

I tear, twist, rip, crumple, bend, jab, crush, puncture, squeeze, gouge, fold, slice, sew, burn a photograph. Then with a wording I occupy (mil.) the freshly revealed space.

The photo-image (news-picture, fashion photography, tv) has the hardness, the incontrovertibility of an *object*—as if it were a possible object of language—whereas it is a language, as Sontag has said; more exactly, a written language, an *object-writing* (writing with light).

The visual writing has a look of flawless transparency as if one were looking through simply what-is-there. But, devious, it is always saying something else.

Text captions, voice comments the photo-image, but they slip on its impenetrable surface which offers no *grip*, no foothold.

The logic and coherency of the photo-image are given to the observer *en bloc* and offer no occasion for dialogue; the image appears unassailable, appears as reality itself.

The text is porous to the imagination, roomy. The contours, edges of words, their images, are elusive, dissolve beneath the fingertips—the tactile, haptic nerve-impulse is frustrated by this gauzy texture.

In the effort to grapple with the intangibility of the intelligible, contemporary poetry has tended toward concretion (from the imagists to concrete poetry).

A certain new fiction has also hardened over with the surfaceness of the photo-image.

At its most material, language reverses *into* image: from language as text and text as "image," to image as text (visual poetry).

The visual poet meditates the image in order to discover a hypothetical, dotted line where the literary, the metaphorical may be inserted—the photo is wrenched or bent or plied open.

He discerns the lineaments of literary desire on the surface of the photo, then excavates the literary image inside the photo.

The word penetrates the gash, gap, hole, soft spot in the photo-image, fertilizes/verbilizes the sterile techné.

Word-rupture interrupts the image, disrupts its monist discourse, produces a dialectic.

Language is the oxygen of the image, allows it to breathe, to have a voice.

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Luciano Ori: Poesia Visiva

The coexistence of diverse expressions (and styles in Visual Poetry) is the mark not of conflict, but of a dialectic and synchronicity. Finally, how this "plurality" becomes unity will be quite clear when the ideological model peculiar to visual poetry has been understood: appropriation understood as expropriation, as á convergent, revolutionary moment which acts and is resolved within the productive structures of art. Ideological unity, in a word, but which is also formal unity, insofar as it is determined and constituted by the common appropriation of heterogeneous techniques and materials expropriated from the various territories of communication. Here it should be immediately said that this operative method cannot be restricted to the mass media alone, as was the case in the primary phase of visual poetry. . . . That sort of demystifying and semiological "guerilla" enacted in the confrontation of the coercive messages carried by the mass communication channels (publicity, posters, etc.) was inadequate and needed, in the logic of a "design" which demanded a broader ideological perspective, to extend expropriation to every field of communication. To plunder every and any linguistic universe, if the productive apparatus of visual poetry was to be supplied with an interlinguistic, synchronic material with which to oppose the codified languages: because these are the real "antibodies" of any neocapitalist society capable of immunizing activity against the more radical processes of social transformation.

The *quality* of the (iconic and verbal elements). . . should be examined, the degree and percentage of their fusion, their combinations and variants. The antiquated and familiar definitions from now on serve only to radicalize the old ambiguities, and the more diffuse typifications such as "paintings to read and poems to look at" will not contribute to any greater clarity. In fact, I would say that this latter is precisely the most ambiguous and erroneous, inasmuch as it situates visual poetry in an intermediate zone between painting and poetry. Whereas it has become increasingly clear that visual poetry does not occupy any intermediate areas, but is a new reality whose identity is peculiar to itself and non-referable. Now this may only be resolved, and so explained, as a *new means of artistic production.*

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Jiri Valoch (Czechoslovokia)

forest piece

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about memory

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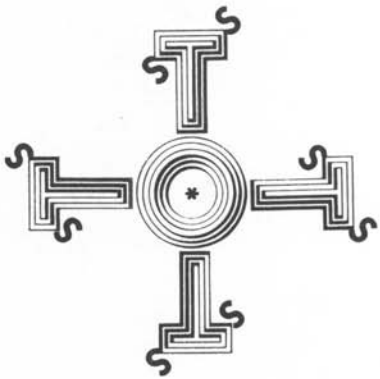
Charles Elwert (United States)



Matinee

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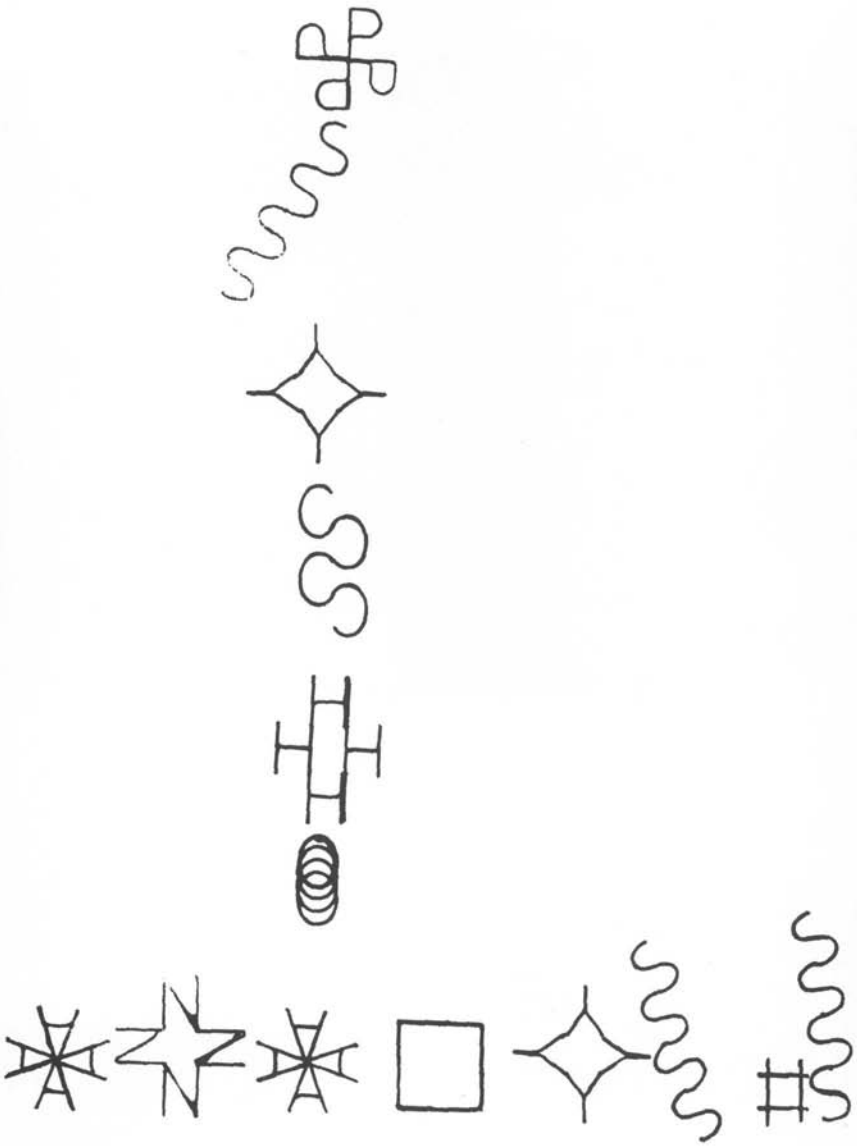

Freudian

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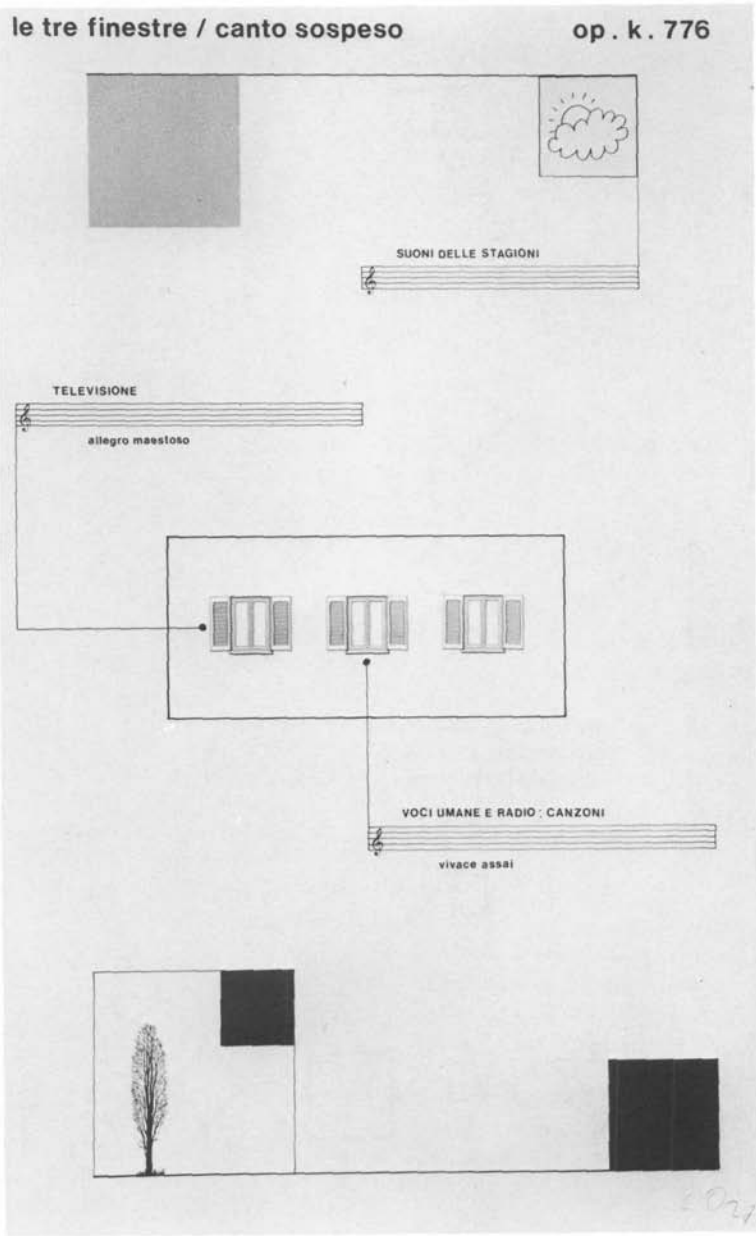
Luciano Ori (Italy)



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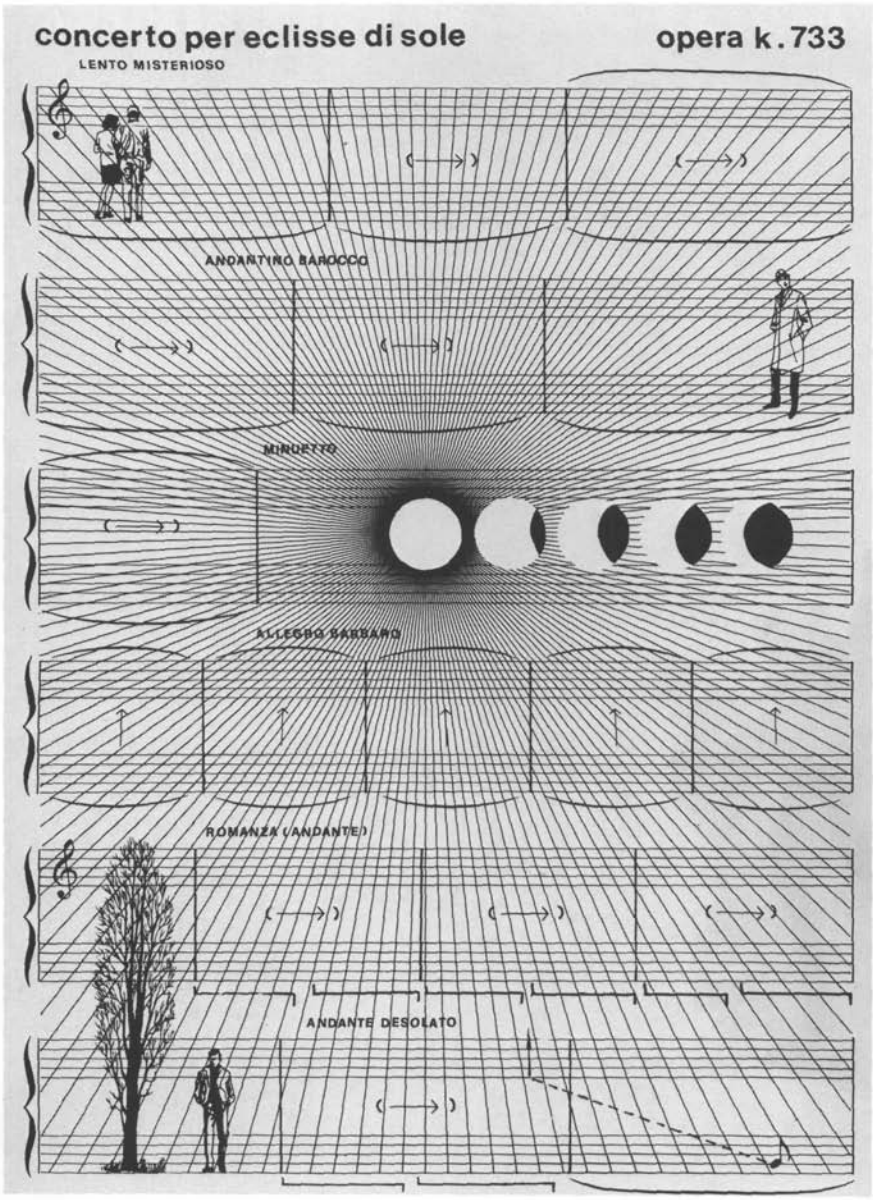

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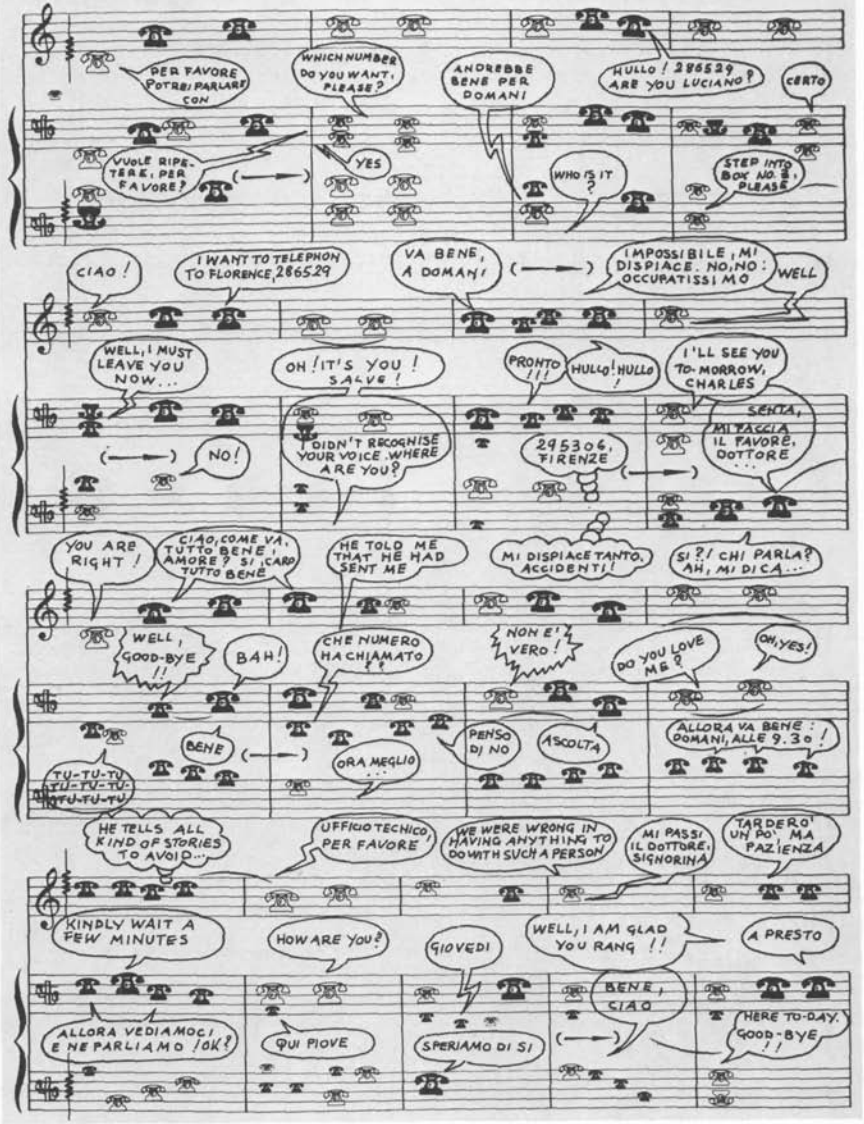
telephone blues

opera k. 731


PER FAVORE POTREI PARLARE CON
WHICH NUMBER DO YOU WANT, PLEASE?
ANDREBBE BENE PER DOMANI
HULLO! 286529 ARE YOU LUCIANO?
CERTO
VUOLE RIPETERE, PER FAVORE?
YES
WHO IS IT?
STEP INTO BOX NO. 8, PLEASE
CIAO!
I WANT TO TELEPHON TO FLORENCE 286529
VA BENE, A DOMANI
IMPOSSIBILE, MI DISPIACE. NO, NO: OCCUPATISSIMO
WELL
WELL, I MUST LEAVE YOU NOW...
NO!
OH! IT'S YOU! SALVE!
I DIDN'T RECOGNISE YOUR VOICE. WHERE ARE YOU?
PRONTO!!!
HULLO! HULLO!
295306, FIRENZE
I'LL SEE YOU TO-MORROW, CHARLES
SENTA, MI FACCIA IL FAVORE, DOTTORE...
YOU ARE RIGHT!
CIAO, COME VA, TUTTO BENE, AMORE? SI, CARO TUTTO BENE
HE TOLD ME THAT HE HAD SENT ME
MI DISPIACE TANTO. ACCIDENTI!
SI?! CHI PARLA? AH, MI DICA...
WELL, GOOD-BYE!!
BAH!
CHE NUMERO HA CHIAMATO??
NON E' VERO!
DO YOU LOVE ME?
OH, YES!
BENE
TU-TU-TU TU-TU-TU TU-TU-TU
ORA MEGLIO...
PENSO DI NO
ASCOLTA
ALLORA VA BENE: DOMANI, ALLE 9.30!
HE TELLS ALL KIND OF STORIES TO AVOID...
UFFICIO TECHICO PER FAVORE
WE WERE WRONG IN HAVING ANYTHING TO DO WITH SUCH A PERSON
MI PASSI IL DOTTORE, SIGNORINA
TARDERO' UN PO' MA PAZIENZA
KINDLY WAIT A FEW MINUTES
HOW ARE YOU?
GIOVEDI
WELL, I AM GLAD YOU RANG!!
A PRESTO
BENE, CIAO
ALLORA VEDIAMOCI E NE PARLIAMO! OK?
QUI PIOVE
SPERIAMO DI SI
HERE TO-DAY. GOOD-BYE!!

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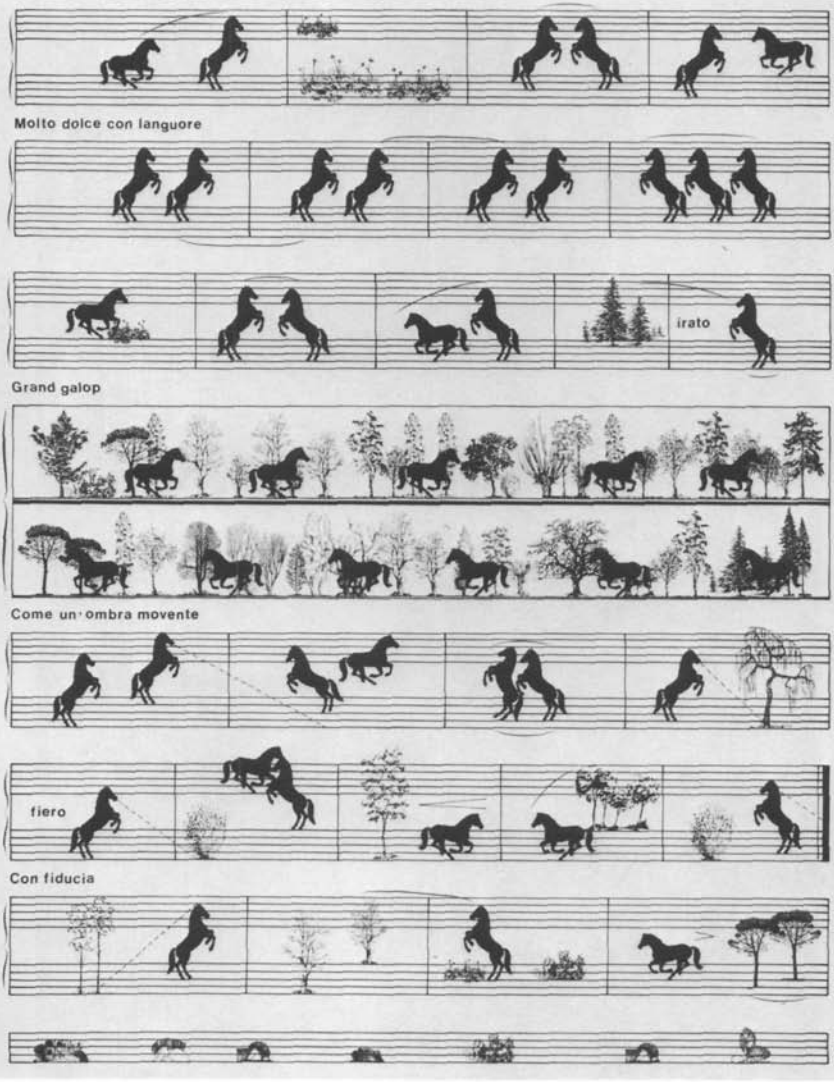
Corral Ouverture

Opera K. 780



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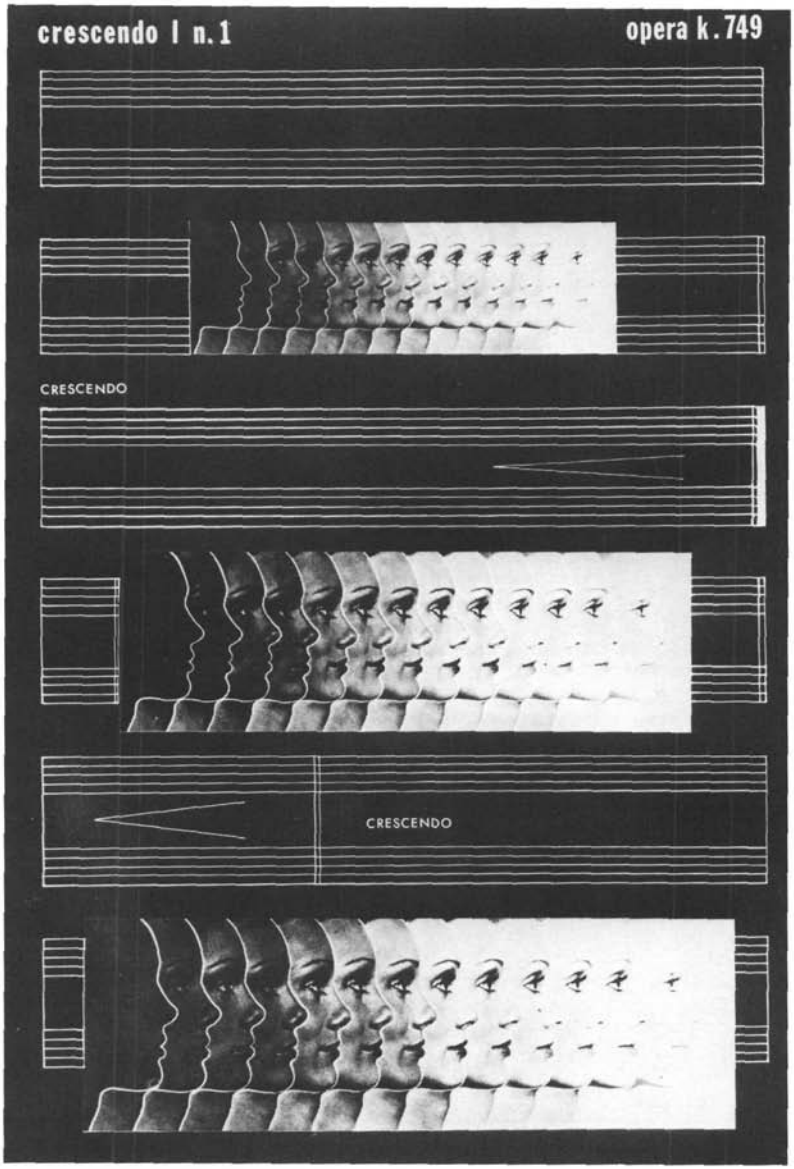

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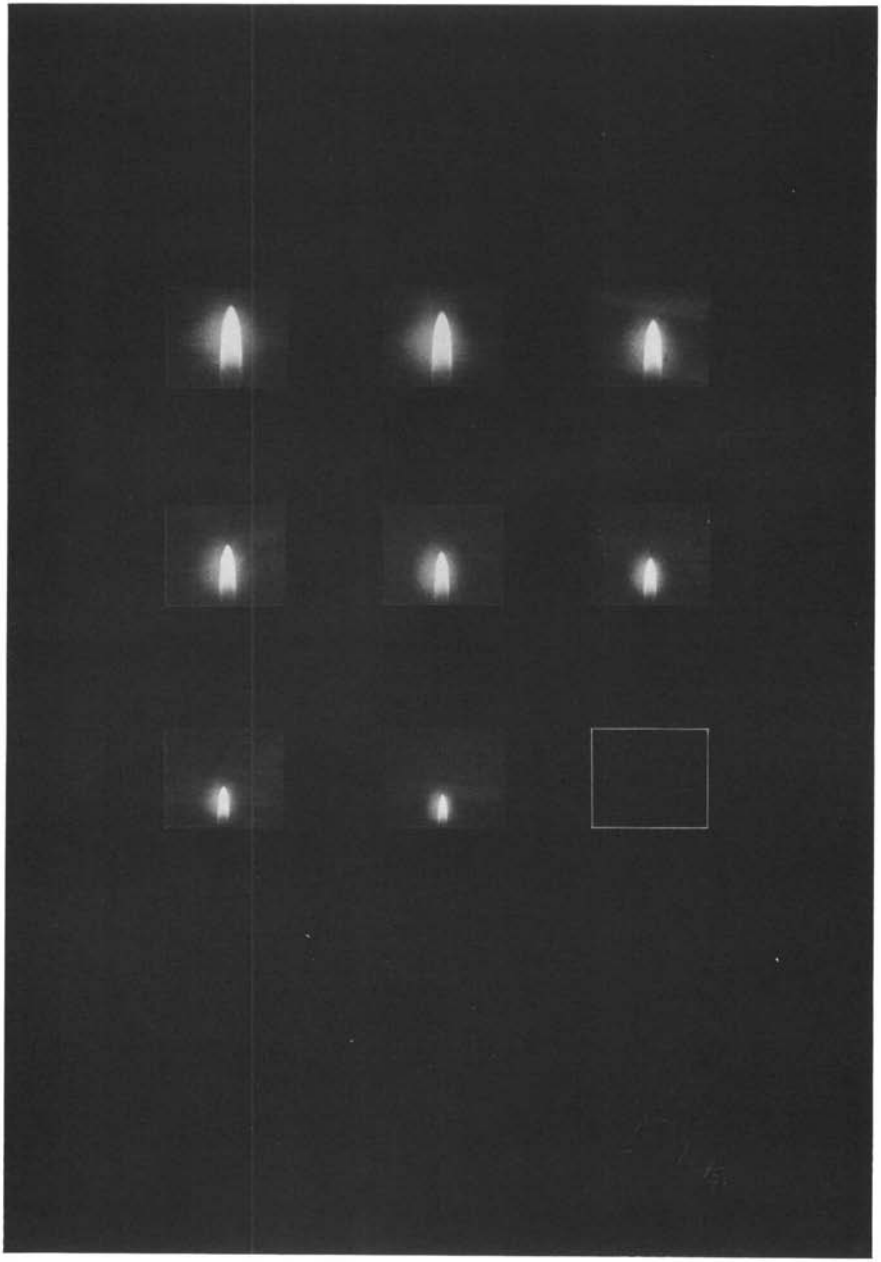

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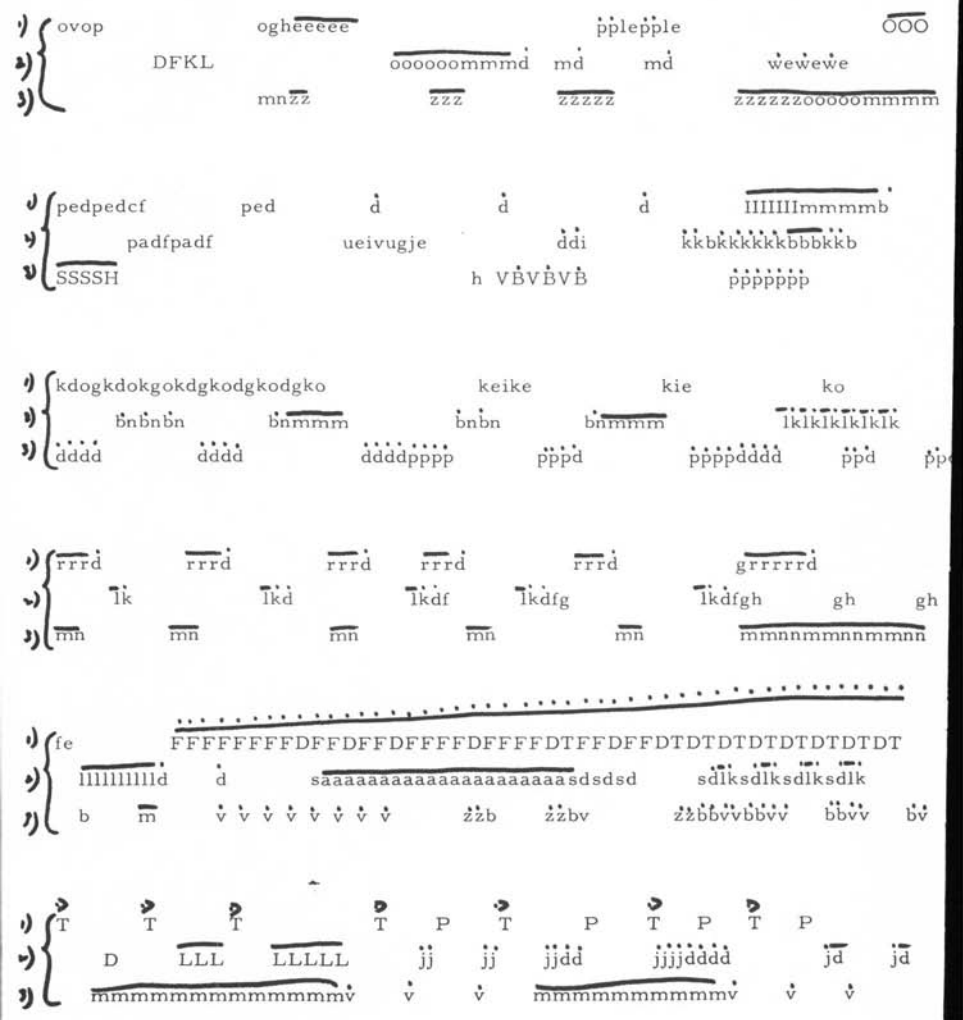
Toby Lurie (United States)

COLOR IMPROVISATION
for three voices



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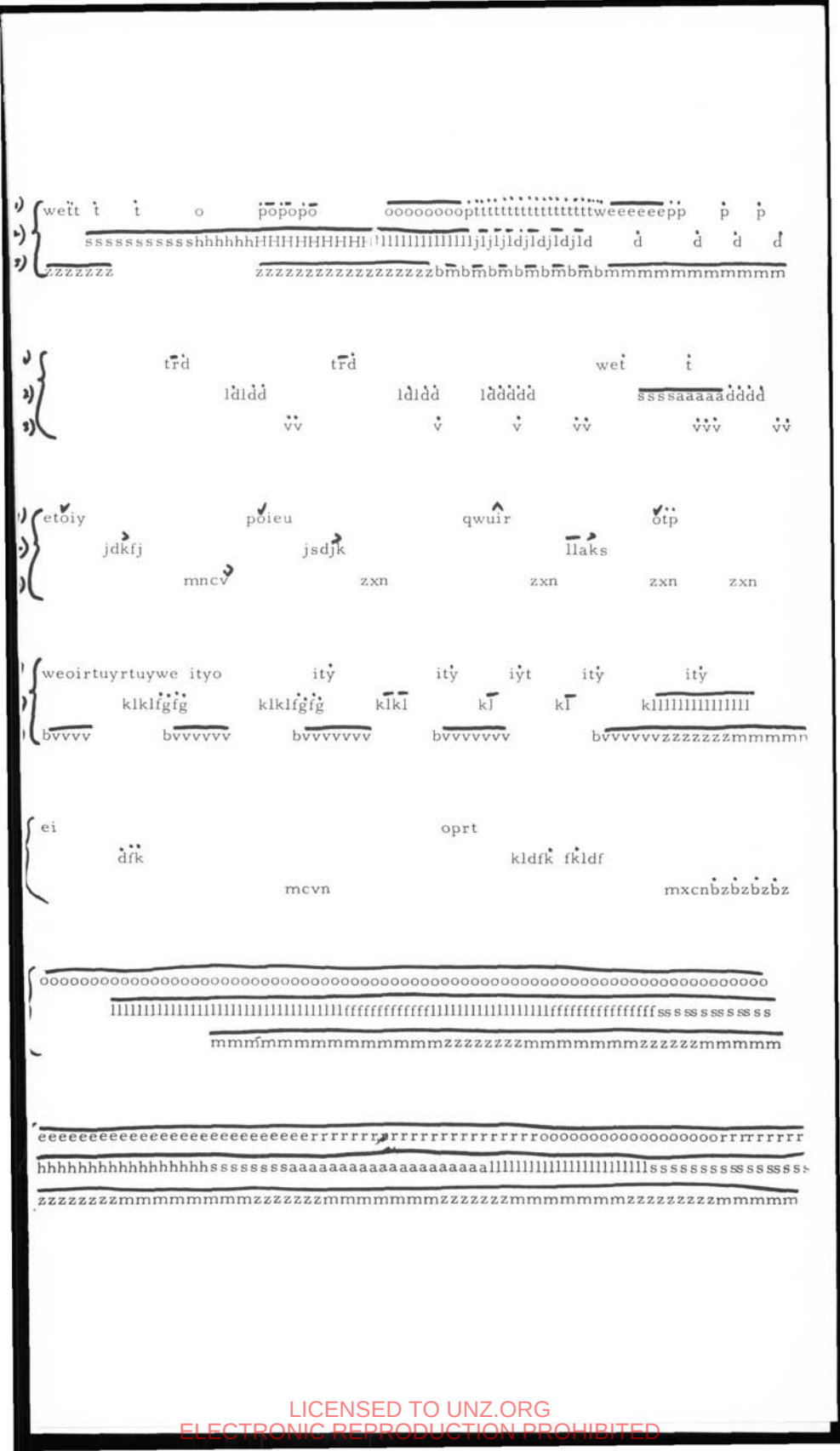

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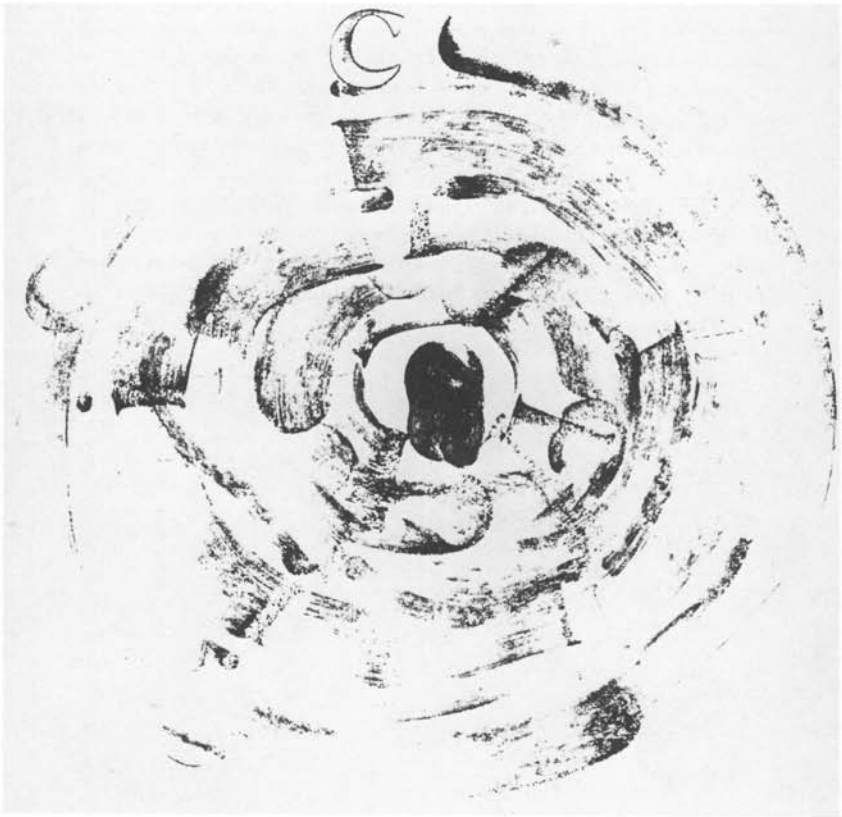

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Scott Helmes: Clues to Myself

Although I was trained in architecture, I consider myself a generalist. My interest in the problems of art, design, communication, and poetry led to an interdisciplinary approach to many of the projects I have undertaken.

My particular revelation in poetry was stimulated by an ongoing interest in communication and the reading of Wright's *Future of Architecture.* My interest in communication led me to experimenting with ways of writing. My first serious poems were a mathematical series in 1972. Through some teaching situations, I discovered poetry, but did not pursue it immediately. When reading Wright's book, where he writes about wanting his work to become poetry, I thought why spend money and resources to create buildings. Since then I've concentrated my creative energy on experimental poetry.

I write because it is a challenge and discovery of self. My writings reflect the release of the tangible from the intangible. It becomes a way of learning, discovering, and communicating elements of language, new languages, and inexpressible language. It is thought translated into vision.

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Takahashi Shocachiro (Japan)

information—sculpture

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Takahashi Shohachiro: Text for "to"

Visual poetry is artifice, or hole. It may be said that the artifice or the hole is a result by the insertion of "to" (=and, with, against, as and so on) as a postpositional word functioning as an auxiliary to a main word in Japanese, or by a sudden lacking, or by a change and a transfiguration.

I. (Case) It is joined with the substantives or the words in the same way.
   A. It means the indication of "that." Being followed by words of "see," "hear," "think," "say" or something else resembling a verb, "to" is joined with their complement.
   B. Meaning "saying," "thinking," etc.
   C. Authorizing that these are certain things or states: by way of; like as, as if; *in such a situation as; being joined with conclusive words* of transformation.
   D. Meaning cooperation:
      1. Showing the object of movements or operations.
      2. Showing the co-operative man of movements and operations. "together."
      3. Using the case of strengthening the meaning of two repeated verbs. "everything, the hole."

II. (Joining)
   A. Joining an end-form of declinable words, showing that movements happen continuously or habitually.
   B. Showing a light paradox. "whether _____ or _____." Reading, again, "to" as a noun suffix of Japanese.

"to" 1. *The fifth of the "t" series of Japanese syllabary.*
   2. The spelling pronunciation of a voiceless consonant (t) and a vowel (o). (t): letting the tip of the tongue join to the back of the front teeth and to the front hard palate, and let the breath explode.

III. A hiragana (the Japanese syllabary alphabet) "to"="と" derived from 止: ="stop" in sōsho (grass characters).
と "to" Name of number. Ten. Door. Gate. Flap. Entrances and exits of a stream. 4.765 U.S. gallons. A unit of capacity. Measure. Ladle for drawing up sake. The Great Bear. The sixth star of the Archer in the southern sky. A square shape. Outside. Water closet. Drawing. Scheme. Sharpness. Sound. Bird. Vain. Whetstone. Bet. Stain. Grain borer. Harmful one in the inside. Rattan. City. Man.

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tezuri 手彫り hand-printing. ～-hand printed. ‖手彫印刷機 a hand printing press.
tezuri 手釣り hand-line fishing. ‖手釣糸 a hand line.
tezuru 手繰る ⇨**tsuite.**
ティー 1 [茶] a cup of tea. 2 [ゴルフの] a tee. ‖ティーカップ a tea cup. ティーセット a tea set; tea things. ティーショット a tee shot. ティータイム a teatime.
ティーンエージャー a teenager.
ティンパニ a kettledrum; timpani.
to 徒 a party; a *company*; a gang (悪徒); a set (連中).
to 途 ¶渡欧の途につく leave for Europe. 渡米の途にある be on *one's* way to America.
to 戸 a door (とびら); a shutter (雨戸); a sliding door (引き戸). 戸の引き手 a door handle [pull]. 戸の取っ手[握り] a doorknob. 戸をあける[締める] open (shut, close) the door. 戸をばたんと締める bang the door. 戸をたたく knock [rap] at [on] the door; tap (at) the door.
to 都 a metropolis. 東京都 the City of Tokyo. 都の metropolitan. ‖都知事 the Metropolitan Governor; the Governor of Tokyo (Metropolis). 都庁 the Metropolitan Government (Office). 都電(バス) a metropolitan streetcar (bus). 都議会(議員) (a member of) the Metropolitan Assembly. 都民 a citizen of Tokyo. 都民税 the citizenship tax.
-to -と 1 [いっしょに] with. 父と行く go with *one's* father. 2 [および] and. 娘と母 mother and daughter. 3 […のとき] just as; when; the moment.... 家に着くと雨が降りだした It began to rain just as I reached home. / It started raining when I got home. 4 [もし…ならば] if. 雨が降ると家にいる If it rains, [In case of rain], I keep indoors. 5 […ところも] (even) if; even though. 何を言おうと say what you may. 彼が行こうと行くまいと私はかまわない Whether he goes or not, I don't care. 雨が降ろうと風が吹こうと in spite of rain and wind. ⇨**-tomo** (-とも).
tō 十 ten; half a score. ⇨**jū** (十).
tō 灯 a light; a lamp.
tō 刀 a sword; a saber; a (surgical) knife (*pl.* knives) (外科の). 一刀のもとに with one stroke of a sword.
tō 塔 a tower; a steeple (尖塔(せん)). 塔を建てる build [erect] a tower. ‖五重の塔 a five-storied pagoda.
tō 糖 sugar. ⇨**tōbun** (糖分).
tō 籐 a cane; a rattan. ‖籐いす a cane chair. 籐細工 rattan work.
tō 蘆 a spike. 蘆が立つ run [go] to seed; [盛りが過ぎる] be past *one's* prime; become a has-been (話).
tō 等 1 a grade; a class; a degree. 1(2, 3)等 the first (second, third) class [grade]. 1等で行く travel first class. 2 [など] and others; and so on; and so forth; et cetera (etc.). 等々 and so on; and so forth; et cetera.
tō 当 1 [当を得た] right; just; fair; proper (適当). 当を得た処置 (take) a proper measure. 当を得ている be right [just, fair, reasonable, proper]. 2 [この] this; the present (problem); [その] that. 当の問題 the matter in question. 当の本人 the person in question. 当の本人は何も知らない He himself knows nothing of it.
tō 党 a party; a clique (閥); a league (同盟); a faction (分派); a coterie (文芸などの). わが党の士 one of our party [set]. 党にはいる join a party. 党を組織する form a party [faction]. ‖党員 a party member; a member [of the Socialist Party]. 党規 party rules. 党三役 the party triumvirate [of the Liberal Democratic Party]. 党大会 a party convention. 党役員 a party official. ⇨**tosei** (党勢), **tōseki** (党籍).
-tō -頭 ¶牛70頭 seventy head of cattle [head は単複同形].
Tōa 東亜 Eastern Asia; the Far East (極東). [(casting) net.]
toami 投網(を打つ) (throw) a cast
tōan 答案 [答え] an answer; [用紙] an examination paper; a paper. 化学の～ a paper in chemistry. 白紙の(よくできた)～ a blank (good) paper. ～を出す hand in *one's* paper. ～を調べる look over examination papers.
to ある a certain. ～宿屋で at an certain inn.
to a shoal; a shoaling ってる The sea is shallow stance from the shore.
t 等圧線 an isobaric line;
to **tobaku** (賭博場).
to gambling; gami mble away
tur で連捕される
red- the act
賭 blic
room,
tōbaku ient to overthrov gawa) shogunate.
tōban r] take the plate; take e mound.
tō の者) a person on duty. かか Who is on duty to- ? / Whose turn is it for duty row? きょうの掃除(*)～は私です It y duty to sweep (the room) ay.
uri 帳 (a) drapery; a curtain. の帳 the veil of night.
su 揚げる 1 [揚げる] fly (a kite) nake] fly (a model plane)
blow off. 帽子を
horse). 自動車を飛ばして行く hasten (to *a place*) in a motorcar. 5 [ページなどを] skip (over); jump (a chapter); omit. 次のページを飛ばします We'll skip (over) the next page. ¶デマを～ spread a false rumor. 檄(げき)を～ send out a manifesto.
tobatchiri とばっちり 1 a splash; spray. 着物に～がかかる get *one's* clothes splashed with water. 2 [そばづえ] a by-blow. ～を食う get a by-blow; be involved in (a quarrel). 罪のない者に～を受けさせておくわけにはいかない It would not do to have the innocent spattered.
tōbatsu 盗伐 secret felling of trees. —盗伐する fell tress in *another's* wood lot stealthily.
tōbatsu 討伐 subjugation; suppression.—討伐する subjugate; suppress; conquer. ‖討伐隊 a punitive force [expedition].
tōbatsu 党閥 a faction; a junto (*pl.* -s) (政治上の).
tobei 渡米する go (out) to America; visit America. ～の途につく leave [start] for America. ‖渡米視察団 a party (of businessmen) visiting America for inspection.
tōben 答弁 an answer; a reply; an explanation (弁明); (a) defense (被告の).—答弁する (make a) reply; (give an) answer; explain; [弁護] defend *oneself*; speak in defense (of). ‖答弁書 a written reply.
tobi 鳶 1 [鳥] a (black-eared) kite. 2 [造職] a construction worker. ¶鳶が鷹(たか)を生む [諺] "A black hen lays a white egg." 鳶に油揚げをさらわれる have *one's* share unexpectedly taken by another.
tobi 枩尾の勇をふるう make a final effort; put on a spurt.
tiagaru 飛び上がる [空中に] fly ft; soar; [人が] spring (jump) up; jump to *one's* feet (驚いて). いすから～ spring (up) from *one's* chair. ～ほど痛かった I almost jumped with pain.
飛び上がって喜ぶ leap for joy.
tobiaruku 飛び歩く run about; romp (はざいて). 金策に～ hustle about to raise money.
tobibako 飛び箱 a vaulting horse.
tobichi 飛び地 [地所] a detached estate.
tobichiru 飛び散る fly about [off] (in different directions); scatter (散乱); splash (水などが).
tobidashinaifu 飛び出しナイフ a switchblade knife.
to 出す 1 jump [fly] out. rush, burst]. out of a room. 檻(おり)の ut of a cage. 庭に～ to the garden. 3 [突出] protrude. ¶家(いえ)を～ run away from home (*one's* country).

text for "to"

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poems fall

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poems fall

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D'Annunzio: The Immortal Who Died

James Salter

Gabriele d'Annunzio was born in 1863 in Pescara, a town in the Abruzzi. He died in a villa overlooking Lake Garda in 1938.

Ariel. A name he called himself and often signed, sometimes as Gabriel Ariel. In every poet, to some degree, there is this lyric angel and the sheer beauty of words is his domain.

Baccara, Luisa. The last of the women. She was a young pianist that he met in Venice during the war and who was with him thereafter. d'Annunzio was passionately devoted to music. He believed that the Italian language possessed musical elements Wagnerian in their power. He felt himself, in fact, to be the heir to Wagner whose death in Venice with the hero carrying the coffin is the closing scene of one of the novels.

Bernhardt, Sarah. She ruled the French stage for more than fifty years, her noted voice lasting considerably longer than her

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beauty. In 1897 she accepted d'Annunzio's play *La Città Morta* (The Dead City) with a telegram of repeated "admirable's." He went to Paris for the opening, carefully writing the addresses of the important critics in his notebooks. The play ran for twelve performances.

Capponcina. The villa outside Florence where d'Annunzio settled in 1898 to remain for twelve years, the most productive in his life. It was the *periodo solare,* his years of the sun. Eleonora Duse, then his mistress, had a house close by. She was, next to Bernhardt, the most celebrated actress in the world and in some respects surpassed her rival. "A noble creature, chosen by me, who ruined herself for me," he later wrote.

The villa was rented but d'Annunzio remodeled it extensively to conform to his taste. The rooms were various shades of gold with heavy furniture, statuary, brocade and bric-á-brac everywhere. He had horses, servants, and two apartments in town. He lived the life of a *gran signóre,* traveling frequently, often with Duse, and writing prodigiously, plays, novels, his greatest poems. From the furnace of his mind, as he said. Towards the end, when Duse had been replaced, the scale of living went from extravagant to ruinous and favorite horses were sleeping on Persian rugs. In 1911, when he had gone to France, the contents of the villa were put up at auction to satisfy the creditors. Everything was sold, furnishings, pictures, even the dogs.

***Canto Novo** (New Song).* The second book of poems, published when he was nineteen. In it was exuberance, sensuality, and a full, assured voice which cried, "...Sing of the immense joy of living/of being strong, of being young/of biting the fruits of the earth/with strong, white, ravenous teeth...." Suddenly he was famous.

Carducci, Giosuè. The great, classical poet who was the early model for d'Annunzio and to whom he sent a copy of his first

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book, published when he was sixteen and still in school, with a very flattering inscription. They met in Rome in the offices of d'Annunzio's publisher. Carducci was middle-aged, with a large stomach, a professor of Italian literature in Bologna. Later he was to become a senator. In 1906 he won the Nobel prize and died the following year.

Croce, Benedetto. Critic, historian, and a kind of philosopher king and true conscience of Italy. He lived in Naples. He was three years younger than d'Annunzio whom he characterized as impotent, despite enormous talent. In his opinion, d'Annunzio simply had nothing to say.

Duse, Eleonora. She was born in a hotel and died in one. The child of traveling players, her name was on posters when she was six. At sixteen she played Juliet in Verona and scattered roses on the body of Romeo: her ascension had begun. She was plain, with a high forehead, faded-looking, austere. She used no make-up. She made herself up morally, she used to say. She was Bernhardt's great rival, playing in competition in the same city on many occasions and once in the same theatre. They died within a year of each other, Bernhardt in 1923, Duse in 1924.

When she was twenty she was seduced by a newspaper publisher and had a child, who died. She carried the coffin to the cemetery herself, it was in Marina di Pisa, a small seaside town where she would later go with d'Annunzio. When she was twenty-three she married a minor actor. They had a daughter. The husband, whom she ultimately left in Buenos Aires, said it was not that she was bad but simply drunk with the stage and the glory of other actresses. She formed her own company and became the mistress of the poet, Arrigo Boito. Divorce was non-existent in Italy then, they could not marry. She was playing Ibsen, Shakespeare, Sardou and Dumas and reading the morning papers in an old shawl and tortoise-shell glasses. There were tours to England, America, Russia, all of Europe.

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She had been urged to read d'Annunzio by a friend and found herself both attracted and repelled. Boito was eighteen years her senior, wise, idealistic, paternal. Now came the incandescent young poet trailing scandalous relationships and an immense reputation. *Amori et dolori sacra—26 Settembre 1895—Hotel Royal Danieli—Venezia* is written in his notebooks with an asterisk. Sacred love and pain. It was the night they became lovers. Even before this she recognized in him the inspired poet the theatre had been waiting for and he at last found his heroine. She was physically and spiritually enthralled. All her life, her manager used to say, on stage and off, she was a victim of love.

In the nine years that they were together, he wrote many plays for her, almost one a year, and she determinedly kept them in her repertoire even though they were unsuccessful, sending him money and false reports from half-empty houses in America. His best play *La Figlia di Iorio,* he gave to another actress, just as he had given *La Città Morta* to Bernhardt. Still they traveled and went on tour: Egypt, Athens, Zurich, Frankfurt. They planned a national theatre they would have at Albano—a Bayreuth of Italy, immortal plays beneath the stars. Meanwhile he was writing the poetry that is considered to be his imperishable achievement as well as, beneath her nose, the novel that exposed her, almost naked before the world.

No one, not even Byron, led so unbridled a life—d'Annunzio was an idol, a fashion, a Don Juan. He was anything but handsome. He was short, baldheaded, with bulging eyes and a prominent nose. His hips were broader than his shoulders. His teeth were described as yellow, white and black. There was something faintly vulgar about him, ordinary, and yet women wrecked their lives for him and, abandoned, remembered him forever. It was simple: he was a god and they believed he was. Their letters, vows, their acts of self-immolation are all the same.

It was d'Annunzio's practice to take his books directly from his personal life. Like George Sand, he wrote notes almost literally on the body of his partner. In the case of Duse, he

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he did not even wait until they had separated, but in 1900 published *Il Fuoco,* (The Fire), which revealed brutally frank details of their relationship. "I love you but I shall make use of you," the hero says. It was a huge success and immediately translated into six languages. Duse could have stopped its publication but chose not to. What was her suffering, she said, compared to the question of giving Italian literature another masterpiece? The English translator was reluctant to render certain passages, but she reassured him. At the same time she felt soiled and ashamed. The character in the novel, who was called Foscarina, had invaded her life.

The following year she put out 400,000 lire, then an enormous sum, to open his newest play. "To the divine Eleonora Duse," it was dedicated. By 1903 his unfaithfulness was flagrant. It was the end. In desperation she wrote to her successor begging for a share of d'Annunzio's life. She then disappeared, in a sense, into tours and distant cities. After several years she retired and bought a small house in the country. Rilke tried to raise money for a theatre for her but was unsuccessful. She had a slight limp. During the war she acted a little and worked in hospitals. Her path crossed d'Annunzio's once, in Udine; he passed in a cheering crowd and she watched. Their last meeting was in Milan. She was in her sixties and wanted to produce one of his plays. As he left her he is reported to have said, "How you have loved me!"

She was on tour in America when she died, in Pittsburgh, on April 21, 1924. Her body was returned to Italy and is buried in the cemetery of Asolo, in the theatre where we will all act some day, as she liked to say. All of d'Annunzio's letters to her were burned. To the end, though, she still blessed him, the great giver of life who had made her what she was. Before him, she said, she had not existed.

Exile. He lived beyond ordinary considerations. By 1910, despite generous advances from publishers, years of lavish spending had left him hopelessly in debt and he fled to France. He took with him a world reputation. He had, since

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the death of Carducci, became *the* Italian poet. These were years of excess, even for a man who was used to everything. He went first to Paris where he lived at the Hotel Meurice and quickly met everyone of importance. It was the Paris of Isadora Duncan, Proust, Diaghilev and Stravinsky. It was also where his estranged wife was living. He divided his time between the capital and a small summer resort near Bordeaux, resuming the life he had lived in Italy: mirrors, divans, damasks, women in emeralds and pearls. He seduced and was seduced. He caught syphillis. He raced greyhounds. His plays were produced one after another. For five years, like a Roman emperor, nothing was denied him. He was small, bald and ugly, Isadora said, but when he spoke to a woman he became transfigured. Eyes lacking kindness and a cruel mouth, Gide noted. A little Italian with a hard face, said Barrès. Nevertheless, he triumphed. He was a figure, a cult. The plays were works of vast pretension, self-indulgent and filled with cliche. Most notable among them was an immensity called *The Martyrdom of St. Sebastian.*

Fantasia. The yacht on which he went to Greece with four companions including his French translator, Hérelle, in 1895. They sailed on a July evening. D'Annunzio had a wardrobe filled with clothes—silk shirts, smoking jackets, shoes. He spent the days lying naked in the burning sun and having the sailors cool him with buckets of water. The conversation was mostly of cities and women and on a vulgar level. They read little or nothing and asked the guides to take them to brothels. In Athens, which was empty in August, they visited museums —the treasures of Mycenae had recently been discovered by Schliemann. From this trip and from notebooks that contained laundry lists and women's addresses came the first book of the *Laudi,* a series that includes d'Annunzio's finest work. When he returned with Duse some years later, he gave a speech saying that he owed to Greece the maturity of his mind.

Father. Francesco Paolo d'Annunzio, mayor of Pescara, land-

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owner and bankrupt. He was born Rapagnetta but took the name of the uncle who had adopted him, providing his son with a priceless legacy although Gabriele d'Annunzio was called Rapagnetta by detractors all his life. The father had small eyes, full lips, dyed hair when he was older, and an unquenchable sexual appetite. He arranged to send his son to the finest school, however, and paid for the printing of his first book of poems. They were youthful, passionate, and well-written. More important, they were noticed by the critics. One of them called the young poet an extraordinary talent. Another, in a phrase that could be applied to him throughout his life, said he deserved a medal and a sound thrashing. He was launched. With a taste for the extravagant which was to be both his strength and weakness, he sent a false report of his death to a newspaper. Obituaries appeared throughout the country. *Gabriele d'Annunzio, the brilliant Abruzzi poet not yet seventeen years old, is dead. He has died just when life revealed itself in all its beauty, when the future appeared imminent and splendid. . . His poor mother! His poor father!*

The father died in 1893. D'Annunzio did not return home in time for the funeral.

Fiume. A seaport east of Trieste with a large Italian population. After the First World War it was to be given to Yugoslavia. D'Annunzio, by then a great hero, passionately opposed this. He began making violent speeches: *Viva Fiume Italiana*—it was a cause.

Supported by Mussolini—still a newspaper editor—and discontented elements of the army, d'Annunzio decided to seize the city. With several hundred men he started for Fiume on September 12, 1919, riding in a car that was so filled with flowers from admirers it resembled a hearse. More men joined him along the way. The Italian general commanding the allied occupation force declined to fire on the invaders and the city was taken.

For almost a year and a half the *Comandante,* as d'Annunzio called himself, ruled Fiume, making speeches

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from a balcony and refusing to be dislodged. A constitution was drawn up: "Life is beautiful. It is. . . to be lived magnificently and severely." Supplies were obtained by piracy.

The embarrassed government finally took courage and moved against him. There were casualties, and shells from a warship showed him the hopelessness of the situation. He capitulated with a Napoleonic letter. He was not punished.

Flying. He flew for the first time in 1909 with the American pilot Glenn Curtiss. He experienced rapture, comparable only to the purest sensations of art and love, he said. There are photographs of him with Blériot who made the historic flight across the Channel and d'Annunzio himself was to lead a flight between Rome and Tokyo just after the first World War. Some of his best descriptions are those of pilots who were his comrades and whom he could still recall vividly even when an old man.

Genoa. The war, which broke upon Europe like a thunderstorm in 1914, found d'Annunzio still in France. One of the most exalted phases of his life now began. Though he was a voluptuary, there was another side to d'Annunzio. He came, it must be remembered from the Abruzzi, a region that was both primitive and violent. He extolled heroism. He loved speed. His creed was virility—he believed Italy was a great nation, that it had been and was to be again. These tendencies had already been made clear in his writing. He had even, in a poem addressed to the new king in 1900, instructed him as to the path that led to glory. For a young nation that path was war. Though the horrors of the conflict were already apparent, d'Annunzio did all he could to bring Italy into it.

It was to Genoa that he came in May 1915, returning from exile, his eyes blindfolded as he neared the border should the emotion of seeing his homeland once again prove too powerful. He delivered the first of a series of incendiary speeches. Italy had an alliance with the Central Powers but had nonetheless entered into negotiations with the Allies to see

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who would offer the most for her participation. It is likely d'Annunzio knew of this—his speech had been submitted for government approval. The occasion was the anniversary of Garibaldi's sailing fifty years earlier; there were some of his white-bearded veterans, still erect, in the crowd. D'Annunzio was not just a poet standing up to speak—he had taken curtain calls, delivered eulogies, gone on lecture tours—he was an actor playing the role of his life. The reaction of the crowd was frenzied. He felt the drunkenness that comes from a cheering mob. He went on to Rome where 40,000 people were waiting for him at the station. Irresistible phrases and impulses were coming to him. He was astride the entire earth. "No! We will not be a museum, a hotel, a vacation resort, a horizon painted Prussian blue where foreigners come for their honeymoons . . . Youth of Rome! Believe what we believe, believe above all and against all that God created victory to be the handmaid of Rome. . . ." He was constantly interrupted by applause. His rooms at the hotel were drowned in flowers. He was summoned to meet the king who held out his hand, d'Annunzio said, to the good fighter who expressed the feelings of his people.

On May 23, 1915 Italy joined the Allies. D'Annunzio telegraphed his friend, Barrès, in Paris, "Beloved brother: I am reading your great words just as the declaration of war breaks over the excited city. They are singing the *Marseilleise* around the column of Trajan. The red and blue of our flags show but one color in the gathering night. . . ."

Hardouin, Maria. Daughter of the Duke of Gallese, she was for fifty-five years the wife of d'Annunzio and his widow for sixteen. As a young girl in Rome she was slender, blonde and unassuming. D'Annunzio had been invited to the family palace by her mother. The daughter was then eighteen with a taste for poetry and art. Soon they were exchanging notes and meeting secretly. They tried to elope but were caught. The affair was made infamous by d'Annunzio's poem, *Sin of May,* that told of a blonde virgin and the gift she gave the poet,

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not to mention newspaper articles and his many confidences to friends. Three months pregnant and over the fierce objections of her father she was married without dowry in an almost empty church. After the honeymoon they settled for a while in Pescara. But she had made a terrible mistake, she later confessed. There were a few years of happiness. She discovered the first infidelities from a letter which fell out of his pocket. She bore him three sons—by the time the last one arrived d'Annunzio merely telegraphed instructions as to its naming.

Il Fuoco (The Fire). The most swinish book ever written, as one critic said. The scene is Venice, an autumnal city beautifully described and a famous actress past her prime, desperate and wandering. She is a woman with memories and the hero is tormented by never having possessed her after one of her triumphs on the stage when she was still hot from the breath of the crowd. Duse was five years older than he, but in the novel d'Annunzio made it twenty. It was a work of pure invention, he insisted. People did not understand the real essence of the book which was "an act of gratitude."

La Figlia di Iorio (The Daughter of Jorio). His most successful play and the only one which remains popular. He wrote it in thirty-three feverish days at Nettuno in the summer of 1903. The summer was his favorite time for work. He would begin at four in the afternoon, have a light meal at eight and work until dawn. He preferred to be near the sea.

Laudi (Praises). The four books which contain the best of d'Annunzio's poetry. They were part of a projected series of seven, each to bear the name of one of the Pleiades. The full title is, *In Praise of Sky, Sea, Earth and Heroes.* Of the four, *Alcyone,* published in 1904, is generally conceded to be the finest. It describes the sensations of a Tuscan summer, the sounds, smells, glare, the burning noons. Many of the poems are of astonishing beauty, and when asked in old age which of his works he would like to see presrved, he said, *"Alcyone."*

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Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien (The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian). A zeppelin of the theatre, written in French, in five "mansions" as the acts were called, with music by Debussy and a cast of two hundred. It was created for the dancer Ida Rubenstein. The costumes and decor were by Bakst. A glittering audience attended the premiere on May 22, 1911, and it was three in the morning when the last curtain fell. Proust found it boring despite the climax when the dancer was bound almost naked to a tree and, avid for matyrdom, died beneath a rain of arows. There were only ten performances although it reappeared between wars in Milan and more recently in Paris.

Leone, Elvira. A beautiful, middle-class Roman he caught sight of standing outside a bookstore. She was the first important mistress. He saw her a second time at a concert. It was the spring of 1887, she was just recovering from a long illness. Within a week he had possessed her and renamed her Barbara. They had seven days of love in a small hotel in Albano. Their desire was, in his words, irreparable and unhealable. She was separated from her husband and lived with her parents. She would come to d'Annunzio in the room where he worked and give herself to him. This was the year when in the golden haze of summer he saw Venice for the first time and here, too, they were together. He made detailed notes of her body which she found and read. These, as well as her letters, he used in a novel, *Il Trionfo della Morte* (The Triumph of Death) in which she is the heroine. "There is but one intoxication on earth," the hero says, "the certainty, the absolute unshakable certainty of possessing another human being." It lasted four years. She sold his love-letters towards the end of her life when she needed money. Nevertheless, she died in poverty.

Libyan War. In 1911, stimulated by the conquests of her neighbors, Italy entered the final phase of the colonial era like a last stock buyer before the crash. Italian regiments sailed for North Africa to fight for the desert, and d'Annunzio's poems in praise of the adventure written from exile and published

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prominently in the pages of the *Corriere della Sera* made him a national poet at last. A hundred thousand Italians finally subdued a small number of Turks and Arabs and Italy had her colony although Italian emigrants still preferred America to anyplace else.

Mistresses. An hysterical Sicilian princess with whom d'Annunzio had two children followed Barbara Leone. Her name was Maria Gravina. She had run away from her husband. He had them tried for adultery; they were convicted but never went to prison. She was moody, suicidal, and jealous to the point of madness; she used to wait for d'Annunzio with a loaded revolver in her hand. After six years he finally parted from her by packing a small suitcase and saying he was going to Rome for twenty-four hours. He never returned. Next came Duse and after her, the tall, blonde Alessandra di Rudini whose father was nothing less than prime minister. She came to the Capponcina on a path the servants had strewn with rose petals, d'Annunzio proudly at her side in a suit of white silk. She was a widow at twenty-six and a noted horsewoman. Nike, he called her. She had met him at her brother's wedding. It was she who introduced d'Annunzio to the Lake Garda region where she had a house. Years later, during the war, he flew over the lake and his notes recalled "the great Alessandra," the summer heat, the foaming horses, the long hours of love.

Nathalie de Goloubeff, as she called herself, was Russian, a singer, she had been sculpted by Rodin. She had two children and a rich husband; d'Annunzio always preferred other men's wives, proven women, as it were. She dreamed of performing in his *Phaedra,* that "severe and noble work," as he called it. She began learning the part, had costumes made, took singing lessons. She was humble before him, her Creator, she called him, she kissed the traces of his hands upon her soul. Telegrams with secret words flew between them. Mixed with this fervent expression were powerful erotic acts. "A great naked bee with beautiful tresses," he called her. When, after several years, he became indifferent she retired to a farm outside Paris,

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where she cared for his greyhounds and pitied her lost life. He sometimes visited her there. Through the war she held on to the farm though the dogs were gone and she lost everything in the Russian revolution. He would weep if he saw her again, she wrote to him. She sold his letters, stipulating that they not be published during his lifetime. She died a begger in a small hotel in Meudon in 1941. Among her few possessions was a handsome dog collar with the name of their great greyhound, Agitator, that had won at St. Cloud.

Montenevoso. Though born of ordinary people in a backward province, the heights to which d'Annunzio rose can be judged by the title bestowed on him in 1924: he was made an hereditary prince that year, the Prince of Montenevoso, a mountain in the Carso range that was significant in regard to the war. It was Mussolini who suggested this honor to the king, most probably to keep d'Annunzio, with his great prestige, satisfied and removed from political life.

Montesquiou, Robert de. The tall, arrogant, homosexual poet who was the model for Proust's Baron de Charlus. He introduced d'Annunzio to the society of Paris in 1910 and was his greatest champion. Brother, they called each other. It was Montesquiou who took him to the dressing room of Ida Rubenstein after a performance of the ballet *Cleopatra.* D'Annunzio fell to his knees. Looking up at the boyish body, the long legs, the narrow head, he whispered, "Saint Sebastian."

Mussolini. Their paths crossed after the war when Mussolini was editor of *Popolo d'Italia* and still a Socialist. He supported d'Annunzio's march into Fiume and even encouraged him to go further, to overthrow the government in Rome. Dear Comrade, it was, and My Dear Friend. D'Annunzio did not have the talent or instinct for such a coup, however. Mussolini later cooperated with the government to bring the Fiume occupation to an end. From this time on he was central to

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d'Annunzio's life, paying him, flattering him, and in a sense confining him. He made a number of visits to the Vittoriale, the last in March 1938 when he walked behind the coffin.

Ortona. D'Annunzio's mother's birthplace near Pescara and the seat of his candidacy for parliment in 1899. He ran as a conservative. He was not and never had intended to be only a poet—the world had to understand that he was capable of everything. His campaign speeches were on a lofty level, almost incomprehensible to the voters. Nevertheless he was elected and his career consisted of two speeches, a duel, and a dramatic change of party when he walked across the Chamber of Deputies from the right to the left, from death to life, he said. In the following election he ran from a district of Florence and was soundly defeated.

Pescara. The seacoast town in the Abruzzi where d'Annunzio was born. Cavafy was born the same year. Chekhov was then three, Conrad six, and Tolstoy thirty-four. Though it now seems difficult to believe, during his lifetime d'Annunzio was more famous than any of them. He was not just the national poet, he was the Great Poet, that phenomenon which appears once in a hundred years like a comet. The national edition of his works comprises some forty-nine volumes.

Rome. It was 1881 when d'Annunzio arrived here, fresh from school. He knew Latin, Greek, and perfect French. He had an extraordinary ear, an eye smitten by beauty, and a desire to earn a place in literature. At first he was the very picture of a young poet, romantic and unspoiled, but within a few years the skimpy black suit and open collar had vanished and he was summoning waiters in cafes with imperious raps of his cane and borrowing money from them as well. He had met Sommaruga, the publisher, and been taken under his wing. He had married in a great scandal and over the intense opposition of her family, the very eligible daughter of the Duke of Gallese, this at twenty. He worked as a journalist and gossip columnist.

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He had no money but expensive tastes. These, he began to indulge, in clothes, furnishings, and especially women. Meanwhile, continually and always, he was writing, volume after volume of poetry, articles, stories, and in 1888 the first of his novels, *Il Piacere* (The Child of Pleasure).

His writing was opulent, dazzling, sensuous. Although part of his heritage, like that of all major Italian poets, was classical, another part was barbaric, carnal, cruel. With this went the confidence of a superior being and the instincts of a born writer, great but flawed. He made no distinction, he said, between the soul and the flesh. He looked on life as a vast and immensely pleasurable garden in which he was determined to absorb every form of beauty.

By 1891 he had a French translator and publisher. He had abandoned his wife and children, was disliked by his fellow writers, by decent people, clerics, critics, and not a few husbands. He was amoral, grasping, shrewd, and on his way to becoming the greatest writer in Italy.

Vienna. It was described in newspapers as one of the greatest exploits of the war. The mission had been cancelled several times, the General Staff was ready to abandon it. At last the weather was right. On August 12, 1918 the planes took off at dawn, one by one, and reached the Austrian capital by midmorning. "Over Vienna a pale mist lay," d'Annunzio reported. "Our manifestos drifted down like leaves falling in autumn."

> *People of Vienna. We are flying over*
> *Vienna and could drop tons of bombs, on*
> *the contrary, we leave a salutation and*
> *a flag with its colors of liberty. . .*

There was scrambling in the streets for the leaflets. Seven hundred miles, the newspapers hailed, with two crossings of the Alps and the stormy Adriatic. D'Annunzio delivered a speech: "We passed in our flight. . . the Isonzo, like a ribbon fallen from heaven, and forgotten Sabotino. . . Caporetto, like the Despair, which climbed up to tear our wings, all our

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slaughterhouses, our cemeteries, our Calvaries, our holy places. No, comrades, don't weep...Remember, remember, remember...." Elated by his success he planned a series of flights over all the capitals of Europe, flying directly over Mont Blanc, the highest point on the continent, as a symbol, but the war ended.

Vittoriale. The name came to him while he was listening to a religious chant. It means, "pertaining to victory." On the front gate is an inscription: I have that which I have given. This was noted by cynics when d'Annunzio offered the property to the state as a national monument on the condition he could occupy it for life.

The Vittoriale, when d'Annunzio came there in 1921, was little more than a small farmhouse near the town of Gardone overlooking the lake. It had belonged to a German art historian who married Wagner's daughter, and was seized as alien property during the war. As he had done in Florence, d'Annunzio set about reconstructing it to his taste, but at state expense. It is filled with books, photographs, grand pianos, sculpture, and military mementos, including the airplane in which he flew to Vienna.

As well as a museum, it is a shrine. Facing the lake is an amphitheatre where the plays are performed in the summer. In the mausoleum the names of those who fell in Fiume are inscribed. There is an entire prow of a warship with its cannon and the torpedo boat in which he raided Buccari. There are gardens, stone pathways, glades. Over the door to the master bedroom is written: Genius and Voluptuousness. On his desk is a bust of Duse. On a photograph of his mother always kept near: *non pianger piu*...from a line of Dante's, "Weep no more, your beloved son is coming home."

World War I. Anguished by the bitterness of no longer being young and exhausted by years of pleasure, d'Annunzio was nevertheless determined to be at the front and not just a writer safe in bed. He succeeded in joining the army. He was fifty-

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three. The military authorities realized he would be of greater value if allowed to play an unconventional role, and as a result he saw action on land with the 77th Regiment and at sea where he led a raid by torpedo boats against the harbor of Buccari. He did more. He commanded a flying squadron, made speeches to troops, fell to his knees to kiss the earth of battlefields. In an aircraft accident he lost one of his eyes. While convalescing in Venice, half-blind, he wrote on slips of paper handed to him by his daughter the book that is regarded as his finest prose, *Notturno* (Nocturne).

Although he was in a privileged position, there is no question of his valor. The war exhilarated him. At the head of his bed was a banner, on his dressing table, talismans and perfume. He flew in patent-leather boots with high heels and sometimes held the bombs between his knees. In the air over Italy he was battered by his age, the passions of his heroines crashing back to him, the memories, the trampled lives. He had no fear, he said, because he expected every mission to be his last and he could desire no greater glory than to die for Italy with "her beautiful limbs, from which harvests, artists, and heroes were born." Death, he described as the male genius to whom youth was consecrated. Blood, wounds, and sacrifice, they were woven into themes to create an invincible nation, a great Italy rejoicing in just battle. One must look at the photographs to understand this, to see the drama in which he had the leading part. "You with us," the blue and white banner of his squadron said, "We with you."

In the end he was disappointed. Like many other men he found it difficult to face peacetime, days empty of intensity. Italy had paid too much, there was little to show for it. A year after the war he had one final adventure when he led his volunteers into Fiume and held it for over a year.

When Mussolini, with whom he had been on intimate terms, seized power in 1922, d'Annunzio had already withdrawn to the Vittoriale where he remained for the rest of his life. He had seduced a nation. He had, as much as anyone, brought his country into the war. He had spent himself. Physi-

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cally and psychologically he was exhausted. The cloak of heroism which he had fashioned for himself had become heavy. With such a cloak, how much farther could he march?

He went as far as Lake Garda. He lies there in a sarcophagus raised high in the open air, surrounded by the bodies of eleven comrades from Fiume. Beneath, in a crypt, is the receptacle for an eternal flame. It is unlit.

Although he may have had a certain contempt for the Fascists, he had inspired them, helped prepare the ground for them, and was sympathetic with their aims. He fervently supported the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. His teeth were gone, he was a trembling figure, addicted to cocaine. The last photographs show someone looking close to ninety, the nose swollen in a collapsed face, the chin that of a tortoise.

He died at the Vittoriale on March 1, 1938 and lay in state in the uniform of a general of the air force. His deathmask is there, eyes closed at last, in peace or at least repose, like a performer resting, like a gambler who need no longer play.

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George Bradley

In Bed With a River

I stood by the river where the flesh of our world
Is swept it knows not where (but I knew)
And thought how one day the bottom land
Would be fields of bedrock, how the soil by increments
Would sift into regions we only dream of farming
And be shifted in vast, lazy motions by the currents:
Steady, unseen, great winds of the oceans.
I stood by the river and tried to forget the sounds
Of the water—almost silence—heard at its edge
A musical rasp, heard the splash of ugly, edible fish
With their guts full of mud and rusted hooks, thriving,
Floating all day through the clouds of dirt.
I stood by and tried to forget I stood anywhere,
That my bones—bidding each other Godspeed—
Had not wandered gently apart to be worn beyond fitting,
To diffuse with tiny puffs into particles minutely aware,
Spinning on themselves like worlds round a star.
By the river I forgot that I was dreaming occasions
Like those built with hard blocks of the pyramids,
Spiteful and desperate, coins of an enraged kingdom
That found out too soon it would be run into the ground.
I am forgetting even you, strange archaeologist, bedfellow,
Surgeon digging in a diseased earth, that finds
A moment's interest, exhumes the token of my presence,
Withered, recalcitrant, featherweight in the palm:
A tooth, five-cusped: man.

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Two Poems by Jayne Anne Phillips

The Village Girl

Tell her you'll do anything to keep her.
The red dress twisted under her is the last of
her mother's history. You want to keep her
always. Every noon you carry her from the house
to the field, her one perfect foot dwarfed by the
other. On the northern slopes townspeople are
grazing. Their bitter grass is that taste filming
the lines of your rooms, the floor swept with a
bundle of straw. Weeks ago the rumpled sheep
were eaten. Girls walked off to other towns
where their clothes bloom in the rain. The
blind beggar's eyes are vesseled white, and
haywagons groaning over stone smell of swallows.
The girl pulls an oatcake from her boot. Let
us eat, she says, And sleep before the owls come.

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Happy

She knew if she loved him she could make him
happy, but she didn't. Or she did, but it sank
into itself like a hole and curled up content.
Surrounded by the blur of her own movements, the
thought of making him happy was very dear to her.
She moved it from place to place, a surprise she
never opened. She slept alone at night, soul of
a naked priest in her sweet body. Small soft hands,
a bread of desire rising in her stomach. When she
lay down with the man she loved and didn't, the
man opened and opened. Inside him an acrobat
tumbled over death. And walked thin wires with
nothing above or below. She cried, he was so
beautiful in his scarlet tights and white face
the size of a dime.

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Sherod Santos

Difficult Place

Sometimes in the evening I see
coming toward me, from a distance,
a kind of blossom: huge, blue, nodding
against this flat continent, taking
the fields away, and changing
irreversibly as the leaves
go by into that visible surface,
the dark, which takes me up,
again, still unprepared among
the lamplight of this year's
perpetual turn. As if my
saying so made any difference,
this is, I assume you know, still
too close to you. Which doesn't
matter. And yet, if it were
anything else, like an elliptical
conversation, or a question of a loon
lifting off an empty tree,
or the room simply gathering
shadows in its usual fashion
and dispersing the dull light
—it would have meant the same.
As though I were standing,
inevitably, at the edge of a secret
place that begins overflowing
its stones, in a way I could only
describe. But you can almost
hear me say it, this is the room
where I live. That same weakness.
Which tells you something
about yourself. And before I sleep,

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as always, I raise myself up
on one elbow and pour water
into a glass, and the dozen acacias
are bleeding on the pond again, which
I can see from the window, the pond
that so often thinks of itself
in human terms, as you'll remember,
on nights like these—or as a fire
around which sullen, disgruntled men
have gathered now that even the moon
has come out and confessed:
but I want to love you with both my hands.
Now that the landscape, like an
unwritten page, is occupied with so many
other details of pain—like the smoke,
coiling there so gracelessly,
the black smoke no one will talk about.

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Two Poems by Liam Rector

Edvard Munch

to Jordan Smith

Eddie, you said you forgot about insanity & death
when you were at the beach. 'From Beer To Eternity'
was as serious as you could take it.
'The land is holy' was as close as you came
to 'Melancholy'. It changed you at the beach, Eddie -

no talk of your mother's nightmares
being family furniture no talk
of the stupor that finally broke your heart
into activity none of the
'lick my sick prick quick'
that made all your women orange
& schizophrenic.

Lots of talk, Eddie.

No, at the beach you were different.
You yakked about restaurants
with the best of them.
Hart Crane hadn't yet leapt in a robe
towards Caribbean love
but nonetheless, you
made your 'meek adjustment'.

At the beach, Eddie,
you worried about your weight
with the best of them. Your vanity
waxed cultural & you were cheerfully
embarrassed

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& we all embarrassed each other that summer, Eddie.
The regrets that sprung from my hangovers
embarrassed us all.
You said 'disease, insanity, & death'
were all absorbed by the larger family

here at the beach. You said
there was no need to worry
    & we went to the movies.

    Eddie, Hedy Lamarr was great in "Boomtown"—
    capitalism in its youth, Clark Gable
    at his height, Spencer Tracy,
    a *good guy*, licking his wounds in South America. . .

    We practiced 'the joy of submission', Eddie -
    all sun & only the work of recovery.
    You were wonderful that summer.
    We used to catch a light off each other
    before you returned

        & started that staring portrait
        with cigarette.

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When Down By Long Boy's Lane

A visionary bowler,
gone down by Long Boy's Lane,
a casually bitter stroller,
a roller with the strain,

went dancing dark through night-town
(suggesting day was done),
fell flat onto the sidewalk
hardly lost but barely won.

The night was to the bowler
as pig is to the ham–
the inside/out of bowler,
the darkness in his hand.

The bowler wanted sky-town,
he stepped into the bars.
He felt the night crawl into him
& dreamt the dreaming stars.

The bowler thought of lovely hair,
of hair in which he cried.
His eyes could see the perfect air–
that air that moves the sky.

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The bowler's drunken sun-up,
the sky with perfect rain–
the bowler grips his planet,
this bowler's earthly lane.

If gods sing to the bowler,
they toast a bitter cup.
When he is looking down from stars
they tell him to look up.

The moon-light, often striking,
as down by Long Boy's Lane,
the bowler drinks the morning
with vision, & in rain.

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Jorie Graham

Mirrors

For some of us the only way of knowing we are here at all,
going
across and going down,
exquisitely temporal though at no point believable; fragile;
tragic.
The mirror redeems

the desire to wish,
what we cannot see of ourselves staring back with its most
accurate face.
The closer you come
the less believable—

life size that dangerous democracy that will destroy its
subjects.
Lookalikes, miniatures,
as in the world of pine, are stabs at freedom:
this limb twisted impossibly, that height not naturally
achieved,

achieved. Or,
taking the lodgepole: in the clearings
their maps are unreadable, carrying their off-centeredness
with vanity,
true love,

slow and doubling like ideas not yet come to term—but
stubbornly
growing thick and burying themselves
in themselves.
While in the forest,

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the modest chemistries of need force all of them to grow
cleanly
identical, histories
where only present tense survives,
the lower limbs all shed in compromise—as if in such a
crowd

being overlapped and overlooked were being free . . .
Too many arrows
for identical hearts,
unwavering, unvarying, every one a hero, a mind

made up. What industry.
What will we become from lack of uselessness. What will we
become
without that acute, fancy love—
branch off my own tree bent back to taunt and almost
look alike.

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Three Poems by Florence Rubenfeld

Circling the Wagons

Sweet element, disguise,
like a partial illustration—
it is our own inviolable corruption.
Not culpability, we put that off years ago,
but a semi-tough reluctance to join in,
a conviction that our own separateness
will cleanse the unknown offenders.

It is not suitability or its opposite.
The steam engine huffs and puffs—
to whom else could we speak
but to the rolling rattle of rail cars
indifferent to their own collisions.

The house to live in is shredded like ribbons,
self-encasement its only shelter.
Outside its bellowing lining, the peaceable kingdom
circles a war dance. There is no one to know
its other possible meanings.

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The Powerful Remove

And you, too, great god Willy-Nilly,
in sorrow at the late hour,
having fortified yourself against several strains of
disaffection
and being beyond reproof
don the power of the grave;
and brown non-chalance, like a
child's survival, crawls its first steps behind you.

You were not there when the bombing started;
you were not there when the others were not there.
You could not see scars and bewilderment to their rightful
dissolution.
but followed patronage and endowment:
what comes naturally from the unnatural,
swings wistfully in sunken air,
and declaims on time indefensible.

The fog is a powerful remove.
Those more devious are shrouded in it,
in a haze that softens the blow,
sighing to pairs who will half have no part of it,
in the awesome amalgam of dread and vapor.

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The Little Rivals

There are no conclusions to be drawn
from the work of the little rivals.
They compete to stay in shape,
and not for the prize and not to spite you.
When the husbands turn their noses up,
the wives are distraught. Some buy chic new clothes
or sheer lingerie, while others will intentionally do neither.

When one of them has her husband seated by her side
at the usual restaurant, it is not his company she seeks,
and not a chance to foul you. When feminists say otherwise
they misunderstand the competition among women.
The competition among women is always
from the skin inwards, from the wrinkles outwards.

I would always let the little rival keep her little partner.
I would let them shuffle off into the sunset
like Charlot alongside the witness of his good deeds.
It is not the woman he wants,
but the testament to his achievements.

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Miriam Levine

For a Poem

You would have to go down
into black earth like my father
gold light against shadow
black as onyx, cool as dew
my favorite combinations.

You would have to leave me
and come back years later in a dream
just before morning
supplicant's hands shivering
against a thin glass.

I would have to wake with your smell
and texture, the cadence and timbre
moving from bed to desk
a cold chapel my words
melting over your body
like baptismal water won't raise you
through this blue chill. I could
tell you how precious, how absent.

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David St. John

Lunch

Even the morning dreams of it

Bent over those torn envelopes or steaming
Papers those Cubist towers
Of paper clips and pink erasures

We think we understand so much but nobody
Ever mentions the secrets of lunch

We plan to meet in some cafe
As the sunlight pours off the buildings
Onto the striped canopies the umbrellas above
The white tables

As usual I'll be late
Stopping on the way to look at books or scarves
Wondering how you'll tell me
Finally to go screw myself once and for all

The secretaries leaving their martinis
The executives phoning in from God-knows-where

I even knew a man who ate lunch
In typewriter stores driving all the clerks mad
Leaving cigarettes burning on the display desks
Rye seeds in the immaculately polished keys
Even poems in the carriage

So here we are again bent over
Those inscribed tablets those endless commandments
Of the menu

Where the choice of wine is blood
James Joyce once said or clear electricity

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Portfolio

Heroic Couplet (The Hustle)

Stephanie Brody Lederman

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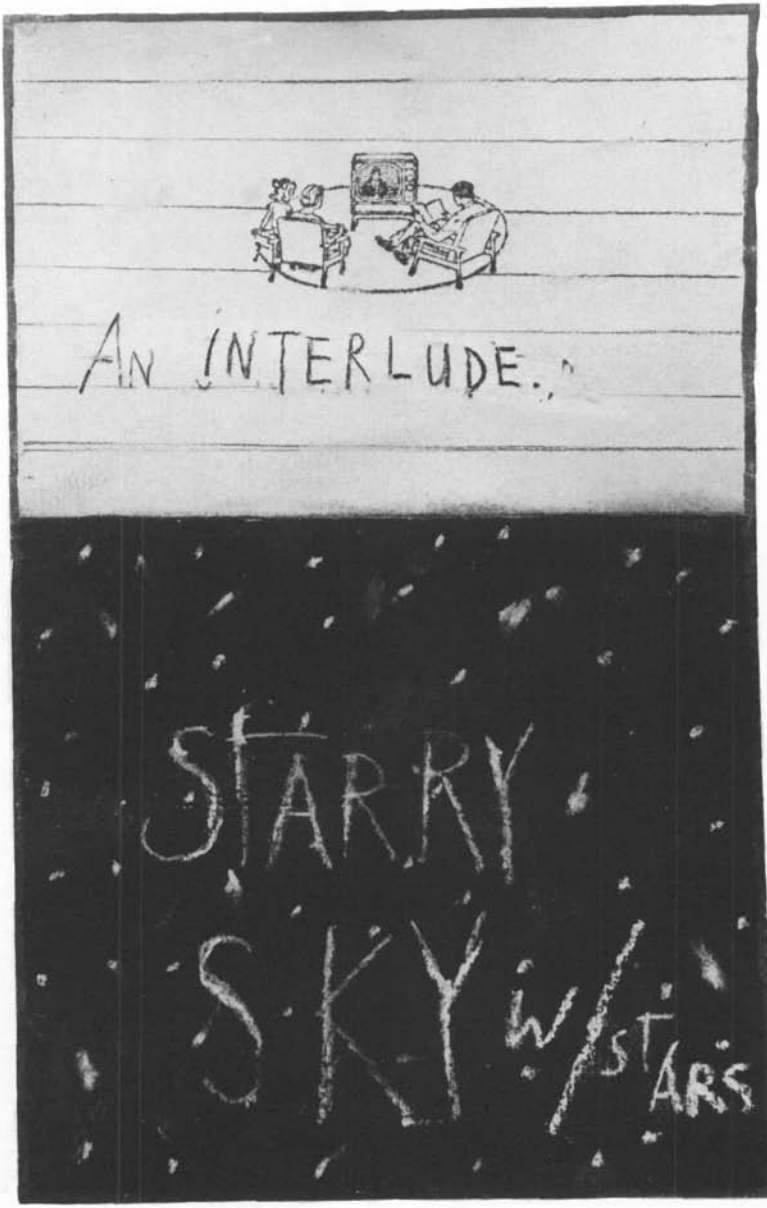

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~~(A MODERN-DAY GOTHIC)~~

HEART-FELT.

Aside:

SHE HAS BLOND HAIR.

... HER MOTHER RUNS A BEAUTY CULTURE SCHOOL. (IN RHODE-ISLAND.) SHE (HER MOTHER) DOES NOT KNOW HER DAUGHTER IS IN LOVE WITH A HISPANIC MAN.

♥♥♥♥

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His hat.

(Hombre).

ANYPLACE YOU hAng ~~YOUR hat~~ IS ~~HOMME~~

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SHE LOVES HIM but.

HE DOES NOT TREAT HER WELL.

PAIN BEAU.

(WALKIN' ON EGGS).

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His Teeth.
(BEAUTIFUL)

WORDS: "I AM VERY FOND OF YOU, ~~BUT I DO NOT LOVE YOU.~~" SHE USED HER FEMININE WILES. (USING HER FEMININE WILES WAS HARD ON HER FEET). ASIDE

(PIÈCE BIEN FAIT.)

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THE SKY

HEROIC COUPLET (THE HUSTLE)

SHE WENT DANCING.

HE WENT DANCING (ALL NIGHT).

WALK.
TALK.
DANCE.

THEY DIDNOT TOUCH.

HE COULD NOT. (TALK).

SHE THOUGHT IT WAS BECAUSE HER MAKE-UP HAd FAdEd.

(THIS PIECE IS ABOUT PRIdE).

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KITSCH/EN Wisdom.

SAGE Advice: (FROM ANN's dAUGHTER.) WALKING ON EGGS IS BAd FOR THE HEART. (~~REFRAIN~~).

A TULIP dOES NOT WaNT TO bE A GLAdioLus.

~~MEMORY~~

LOST

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A ~~Memory.~~
His white EVEN teeth. YES.

Fin.

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Mary Kingsley's Importation of Duke Ellington To America

Scott Paul Elledge

"IT DON'T MEAN A THING IF IT AIN'T GOT THAT SWING"

Mary Kingsley:

My parents died and suddenly I was left with nothing to do. I went back to the piano, but Mozart would no longer calm me, Hadyn no longer excited me. I played lawn croquet and fell asleep in the topiary's shade. I attempted needlework, but my fingers were long and clumsy. A friend introduced me to mahjong. We played for hours and I was very bored.

Other friends came back from Somalia, carrying elephant-foot hassocks and ostrich-feather poudahs. Everyone was "doing" Africa in those days. I watched the tourists step off the cruisers, dark as porters.

Father himself had traveled Africa. On many dreary, crepuscular days I had leafed through his photograph albums, in which men of all races were the same sepia tone.

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He had been studying entomology, and I vowed to finish his work.

I decided to venture through the African colonies as a trader. I bought yards and yards of calico and gingham, and I signed up with a large London firm. Everything was stuffed into sturdy portmanteaus and valises, including all my father's scientific equipment for collecting native specimens. Friends added crumpets and watercress sandwiches at the wharf, to remind me of home, they said.

Duke Ellington:

I wanted to be a painter (I did enjoy cubism), but canvas rots so quickly in the jungle. Besides that, few traders carried oils or palettes. They offered us the same old calicos and ginghams, until the whole tribe looked like they were part of a Broadway chorus line.

The missionaries came through and set up outposts in our village. They were all grim and dour and for a long time we laughed at them as they hacked at lianas and draped mosquito netting, until finally most of the tribe converted and became grim and dour, too.

There was an old upright piano which had been hauled from Europe to the new missionary school. I showed interest in it (I don't recall exactly my first impressions of the piano; it was just suddenly there, as if it had been there all along), having long grown weary of drums, kimbalas, and such. The missionaries taught me to play eventually, so I played hymns during Sunday school classes. That was alright, but it was no Carnegie Hall.

Mary Kingsley:

Everyone took me for a missionary. I suppose it was my appearance—all in black with my hair pulled back tight. But I looked with disdain upon the missionaries. They wanted all the Africans to behave like children at catechism class. The

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idea was preposterous. The best way to save them, I told more than one Congo Christianizer, was with currency, not conversion.

As for my business ventures, I was marvelously successful. I traded for ivory and rubber, and I shipped loads of the stuff back to London, asking to be sent more material.

The very humidity of the African air was invigorating; the peoples I encountered were uninhibited and charming. Rare insects seemed to flutter onto my mounting boards and impale themselves there. The native cuisine was a bit on the gamey side, but had it been properly spiced, it would have made the best of maître d'hôtels blush with jealousy. I swatted innumerable mosquitos and drank endless cups of tea.

I set out to reach Gabon by way of the Ogowé River, which led through wild, almost impenetrable territory. All I asked for, though, was a good thick skirt and a hat, and I was ready to take on the most overgrown of foot-paths. My loyal boatsmen and I went by canoe, of course. To pass the time we sang show tunes, counted ibises, and played word games. We spent many a night at the edge of delightful swamps which brimmed with snags, mud, and leeches, and I listened in the darkness for crocodiles shifting amongst the papyrus reeds.

One night we stayed at a village where the missionaries had recently been, judging from the number of makeshift crucifixes on bare chests. I presumed that the good Christians had moved on to trouble more peaceful natives with their horrid stories of martyrdom. That night I was exhausted, and I went almost immediately to my accomodations for the night—a small hut of a widow who had previously passed away. Her hands were nailed to the door, as was the custom of those who kept the old ways. My sleep was, needless to say, ephemeral.

I awakened to what sounded like piano music. At first I thought it was just a dream or wind in the palm fronds, but then I heard it again, with my eyes wide open, and the sound was unmistakable. Out the door I went, carrying along my

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box camera in case this was some important ceremony I had not been informed of.

The music was coming from a cabin around the corner that the missionaries must have built. So that explained the piano! I stopped for a moment outside the door. Someone was playing "Jerusalem," but in a manner I had never heard in my church-going days. It was low and high at the same time, and the chord progressions were dark and pulsing; the effect was hypnotically enthralling. I came closer and opened the door.

Duke Ellington:

The missionaries left to go pick up supplies on the west coast. While they were gone, I went over and over their hymnals, until I discovered that I could change things around in my own style. Still, I felt confined and wanted to learn more. No one appreciated what I was doing, so I practiced at night while they were all asleep. All anyone else wanted to hear was "Bringing In The Sheaves," in two-two time.

It was later than usual one night, and I was doing whatever came naturally on the piano. I didn't even know what to call what I was doing; it was just exciting and adventurous. Then the door opened and I shut down the piano lid right away, almost crushing my fingers, because I thought it was the chief coming to complain that I was keeping him awake again.

I was wrong. It was a Caucasian lady I had not seen before. She stood in the doorway for a long time, looking at me in a curious way, and I didn't know what to do. I thought she was a missionary; she looked like one. But the sight of her thrilled me in some forbidden way, which I would not come to terms with until much later.

Then she asked me to play some more, because she said that she liked it. I was delighted to please her. She was a very well-mannered lady. She made us both some tea and I played for her until the sun rose.

She asked me my name, in that polite fashion she had. I told her that my name was "Duke." That was all. The

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missionaries hadn't gotten around to thinking of last names yet. She suggested "Ellington" because she said the name had class. It sounded very elegant to me, so I accepted it.

That same morning, she went to the chief and bought me from the tribe for fifty yards of red and gold calico.

Mary Kingsley:

I took Mr. Duke Ellington back to England with me. He was, by far, the best specimen I had picked up in Africa.

I must make it clear that I bought him only to extricate him from his village; he needed to get away in order to find an outlet for his music. Life in the jungle had been harsh and inhospitable to him and his talents. He had begged to return home with me. After that he was free to go, but he preferred to stay with me. I guess he liked having an audience as receptive as I was. I promised to help his career in exchange for his becoming my butler.

He was a very intelligent youth and an excellent butler. Such etiquette! Such politesse! And he was extraordinarily witty. He unfailingly euchred me at mahjong, although he sometimes became carried away in spirits, and we were a long time behind the Chesterfield looking for the tiles he had upset.

I taught him all the piano I knew. I taught him the classics. He fell in love with Chopin. I taught him music-hall numbers, Welsh dances, Irish lullabies. I taught him whatever sheet music I found in my piano bench. He had tremendous potential; he soon outgrew all I could teach him. Yet, he had still not found the music he heard in his heart. There was new music in America, I informed him. It was called jazz. Maybe that was it.

We sailed for America. The books I had written on my African travels (*Travels In West Africa* and *West African Travels*) had been popular there. I had been invited to give a series of lectures throughout the country, sponsored by my American publishers. Mr. Ellington and I came over on the White Star Line. He was extremely excited during the entire

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voyage; he could never relax in his deck chair. Our first stop was New Orleans.

Duke Ellington:

I felt like I had found my real home in the United States. Things were brighter, louder, more optimistic there than in foggy England. The rhythms were my own, and I fell in love with the people and their music.

In New Orleans I discovered jazz. It had been what I was listening for all along. It was the style I had been striving for since my African days; now I had a chance to develop it among those who understood.

I strolled down Bourbon Street and conferred with Dixieland band leaders who wore striped jackets and straw boaters. I held surprising tête-a-têtes with blind bluesmen in East St. Louis. It was all a wonderful holiday.

I began to compose during Miss Kingsley's lecture tour. She applauded the idea. I knew what I was doing now, and I left plenty of room open for improvisation. Miss Kingsley was fond of my work. She said it reminded her of Sibelius in its compassion. She was a generous person, I have to point out. The trip over on a cruiser had certainly exhilarated her. She rented the finest Steinways and Baldwins for me to practice upon.

While we were in Chicago, she suggested that I play a selection of my compositions in a talent show at a night club. I played my "Black and Tan Fantasy" and "Solitude." I played with a casual exuberance and the audience chose me as the winner. Miss Kingsley was ecstatic. She prompted me into forming an orchestra immediately.

I did so, after auditioning dozens of musicians and choosing only the finest. Soon I learned the nuances in tone betwixt a saxophone and a trombone, a cornet and a trumpet. I wanted a special sound in my musical arrangements, a sound which would gratify the most debauched ear. We made many shellac recordings. We played dance halls and debutante cotillions and firemen's balls. The public

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seemed to like us, and we were booked solid for months at the Cotton Club.

Mary Kingsley:

The Cotton Club was a wonderful thing for Mr. Ellington, but I saw it as the beginning to the end of our relationship. My lecture tour had come to a close, and I rested in my sea-green suite of rooms at the New York Astoria, preparing my next book (to be titled *Western Travel In Africa*) while he charted arrangements at the club.

When he came to the hotel in the morning, after a long night of performing, he was tired. He slept in a room opposite mine. Other people, revelers all, were tugging at my cuffs in either direction for me to join them in quick bottles of claret or rush to gallery openings. I saw less and less of him, and found myself missing his butlering—indeed, just him—more and more.

I thought often of our tranquil days in England. I remembered demonstrating new figures on the piano for him. His dark fingers would caress the ivory keys in return, and I considered commiting wild, desirous acts. Only now, while he was away, did I confess to myself that I had thought such things.

What grace his shadowy body had! Once I shook his hand in conceding defeat after a fatiguing game of badminton, and I had been tempted to run my fingers up his arm in abandon.

The maid would come into the room each afternoon, polishing the fireplace pokers for the hundredth time and taking away the crumpled pieces of paper I filled the waste-baskets with. She never failed to ask if I were progressing well on my book, and I always answered that I was. The truth was, my mind was on Mr. Ellington. I heard him more often on the radio than I got to see him. When his records were played, I would very likely leave my book for hours.

I thought again of those times he had serenaded me on the piano with melodies he seemed to snatch from the breeze. To

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paraphrase Shakespeare, if I may: "Oh happy keys, to bear the touch of Ellington."

I looked at myself in my hotel bedroom mirror. I was no longer young. The equatorial sun had done cruel tricks with what were once smooth, unblemished hands. My eyes were small and sunken; my skin was blanched and unappealing. I still wore my hair drawn severely back. I did look for all the world like a missionary, misplaced in the city, perhaps, and reflecting upon things that were far from holy.

He was sleeping right across the hall. I could enter his room and close the door behind me, gently, and quietly drop my robe to the floor. A man had never touched me before. What would his reaction be?

Duke Ellington:

I missed Mary Kingsley after she went back to England. My orchestra had gone on tour; I was unable to see her off. She had left in an unexplained hurry from the Astoria, without notice.

Sometimes I would be playing late at night in a smoky speak-easy, and a woman would walk through the door in back of the audience, and I would think it was her. But it never was; it was always a stranger's face under that hat.

I tried writing her, but my words and sentiments were clumsy. The special tenderness I had in my heart for her failed to come out on paper. Besides, it was too late for a formal proposal. She would have turned me down, or worse yet, ignored it. In all events, she failed to correspond, although I assumed she received my letters. Perhaps I had been too brash, after all.

I sometimes wondered what she would have done if I were to suddenly embrace and kiss her. I must confess that such feelings do run through a young man's mind. However, it would not have been proper, I suppose, for a lady to accept such actions.

She continued to inspire me. I wrote "Subtle Lament" and "Diminuendo In Blue" especially for her, hoping only

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that she might hear them on the radio and understand.

But we were living in separate worlds now; we had been apart too long. Worst of all, we had kept our real feelings for each other secret.

Yet, even after she died searching for rare beetles among the Boer settlers in South Africa, I would sometimes look up from my piano and expect to see her standing there, smiling down at my hands, as she had so often done. I might pause for a moment, as if waiting for the darkness to speak my name, and go back to choosing chords in that same careful manner she had once chosen which millipedes to pin to her mounting boards.

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Two Poems by Seamus Heaney

Leavings

A soft whoosh, the sunset blaze
of straw on blackened stubble,
a thatch-deep, freshing
barbarous crimson burn-

I rode down England
as they fired the crop
that was the leavings of a crop,
the smashed tow-coloured barley,

down from Ely's Lady Chapel,
the sweet tenor latin
forever banished,
the sumptuous windows

threshed clear by Thomas Cromwell.
Which circle does the tread,
scalding on cobbles,
each one a broken statue's head?

After midnight, after summer,
to walk in a sparking field,
to smell dew and ashes
and start Will Brangwen's ghost

from the hot soot-
a breaking sheaf of light,
abroad in the hiss
and clash of stooking.

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Polder

After the outburst and the terrible squalls
I hooped you with my arms

and remembered that what could be contained
inside this caliper embrace

the Dutch called *bosom*; and *fathom*
what the extended arms took in.

I have reclaimed my polder,
all its salty grass and mud-slick banks;

under fathoms of air, like an old willow
I stir a little on my creel of roots.

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Herbert Morris

These Are Lives

One could as well have chosen
that life of supermarket carts
junked in the backyard,
where you stand and wait
with your mechanic's hands
and a bare chest
in summer, light
behind you jammed into the picture,
its code undecipherable
even by the camera,
so steep and dense its
dreaming smeared on the warped
boards of the toolshed, makeshift
cinder path, and what once must have been
grass of a lawn now given way
to automobile parts and that complication
of wreckage, brutal and casual
at once, whose talent it is to attach
itself to us in California
or to those lives in other places
we accede to.

Where evening finds us
I cannot name yet; these are lives
best seen, or dreamt, beneath that sun
of backyard chaos
and indeterminate nourishing power,
that sun of rusting crankshafts,
of beached headlights, where you wait
for what shall not be named yet in this poem,

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where evening finds us,
should it find us,
on a second-hand mattress whose bent springs
jangle when the wind lies right,
those mechanic's hands
to small avail
against the infinite
machine turning
the stars on over California,
the dark no doubt insisting moonlight
color chaos silver soon in backlots
where supermarket carts
and auto bodies
await, if we are gifted,
restoration at our hands
(and we are gifted),
we who, beneath that daylight etched
like anniversaries on the calendar
nailed to the toolshed wall,
wait for what has not disclosed its name,
neither in California
nor in this life of bleached,
unlikely places.

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Margaret Kent

Where It Came From

I got this from a man on the street
in Richmond, *circa* 1964, who
offered me an easy job in his hotel
room overlooking the city park.
Dingy yellow curtains, a fake call
to the bellboy, tinkling glasses
and all that. But the scene's always
being set with such care to lure
the careless to the prearranged: the
verdict being sealed, one's
goose being cooked, endless seedy hours
of preparation for the gullible
who come looking down-in-the-mouth, or
else riding white horses down
city streets where they don't belong,
easy targets for the wary who,
with fat fingers and thumbs, lay the
cards out ahead of time, sit
back musing in fringed smoking jackets
or take to the streets where
even their footsteps are timed like
the precise distance between
echoes, or the letters in a name:
I saw him pacing outside a
grand hotel, his shoes looked up at me,
his rings were the color
of light. I knew he had the goods so
I followed him, up in the air, then down.

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Thom Gunn

Sweet Things

He licks the last chocolate ice cream
from the scabbed corners of his mouth.
Sitting in the sun on a step
outside the laundromat,
mongoloid Don turns his crewcut head
and spies me coming down the street.
'Hi!' He says it with the mannered
enthusiasm of a fraternity brother.
'Take me cross the street!?' part
question part command. I hold
the sticky bunch of small fingers in mine
and we stumble across. They sell
peaches and pears over there,
the juice will dribble down your chin.
He turns before I leave him,
saying abruptly with the same
mixture of order and request
'Gimme a quarter!?' I
don't give it, never have, not to him,
I wonder why not, and as I
walk on alone I realize
it's because his seven-year old mind
never recognizes me, me
for myself, only says hi
for what he can get, quarters to
buy sweet things, one after another,
he goes from store to store, from
candy store to ice cream store to
bakery to produce market, unending
quest for the palate's pleasure. Then
out to panhandle again,
more quarters, more sweet things.

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My errands are toothpaste,
vitamin pills and a book of stamps.
No self-indulgence there.
But who's this coming up? It's
John, no Chuck, how
could his name have slipped my mind.
Chuck gives a one-sided smile, he stands
as if fresh from a laundromat,
a scrubbed cowboy, Tom Sawyer
grown up, yet stylish, perhaps
even careful, his dark hair
slicked back in the latest manner.
When he shakes my hand I feel
a dry finger playfully bending inward
and touching my palm in secret.
'It's a long time
since we got together,' says John.
Chuck, that is. The warm teasing
tickle in the cave of our handshake
took my mind off toothpaste,
snatched it away, indeed.
How handsome he is in
his lust and energy, in his
fine display of impulse.
Boldly 'How about now?' I say
knowing the answer. My boy
I could eat you whole. In the long pause
I gaze at up and down and
from his blue sneakers back to the redawning
one-sided smile. We know our charm.
We know delay makes pleasure great.
In our eyes, on our tongues,
we savor the approaching delight
of things we know yet are fresh always.
Sweet things. Sweet things.

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John Ramington

Theological Reflections at Roger's Tavern

"Jesus bent down and started writing in the sand with his finger."
—John 8:6

Jesus wrote in the sand.
I write in red notebooks. . . .

After grace and after rain,
even the most sacred and profane
words sprout like mushrooms
in the grasslands of the soul.
And in the mind, as in circular
white rooms of lighthouses near
the ocean on April afternoons,
bluebells and bridal wreath,
and Easter lilies with glittery
green leaves, live as music lives
and remain like scattered sunlight
rediscovered after rain.

This is the only instance I recall
of Jesus writing anything at all:
an absent-minded scribble in the sand,
perplexing scriptural footnoters,
who declare, *The significance of this gesture is doubtful!*

I take to the air
over that gesture, and I make this
little prayer for all to hear:
"Let me write in my red notebooks.
Jesus scribbled in the sand."

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Richard Tillinghast

Sovereigns

(after Rilke)

The sovereigns of the world are old,
and die without heirs.
Their sons die young behind guarded doors.
Their daughters yield weak crowns to violence;
they break in the rough hands
of the people.
The haughty, beefcattle faces bleed
into eagles and hammers.

New money, new metal, new rulers,—
the old glitter just beyond reach:
rows of decorations on white dress uniforms.
They reincarnate as gears
to turn the machine of the world.

But no one owns luck.

The ore is wild, and homesick.
Each day is one day less
until it disappears
from the mints and factories
that show it so poor a life.
From bank-vaults, from inside clocks,
in dreams it runs again
through slow arteries inside mountains.
The heart pauses,
and pumps it back to the source.

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Lewis Hyde

Street Money

As I ride my bicycle home from work at sunrise
a young fellow with an upturned collar asks me for my
"spare change."
He is friendly, as if we were classmates meeting in the
schoolyard.
A slight smile is on his lips—we're all in this together:

those old men who lean on the sills of shop windows,
the boy in silver shoes strung out on Black Beauties, shaking
as he asks me for a handout by the Anderson Gate,
the man I saw last September near the Exeter St. Theatre,
"First Spiritualist Temple of Boston," that man
on the far sidewalk with nobody near him, his hands
stretched out and saying, "Nickels, dimes," as he walked,
"Nickels, dimes": an old litany cut free of the con
and floated up into his throat, like the slot in a machine.

The coins move in and out of our bodies, a metallic
circulation
like lumps of food or warmth or "I like your eyes,"
and the child whose father works the nightshift sits alone
on the sofa and swallows her pennies, the wonderful acidy
taste
of affection in the mouth (rushed to the hospital—
the "Wishing-well Syndrome"—and the love pours out of
her).

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Holes in our pockets, holes at the knees of trousers,
and these coins, like thick sail-makers's needles,
pass back and forth, stitching us together
so that we might be a sleeve in the early morning, not these
dry flakes,
so that when the first, frail light slants on the brick walls of
factories,
when the man who has worked all night meets the man
with no work
we might be one body sewn like a robe over the rim of the
world.

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Three Poems by Joyce Carol Oates

Mythology

Where the gale winds blew they crouched low
where too much horizon leered they fashioned a circle
and drew its boundaries tight

and the sky split whitely open
like a bruised fruit

and Richard Dadd having killed his father Robert Dadd
(who was the Devil)
stared for hours at the white sun entranced

"Father" he said finally "My father is the sun"

Honeywarm coals of gratitude flowed
upon his trembling head

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Painting the Balloon Face

At first when you believed
you didn't need to paint the face
you weren't required to paint the face
the painting of the Balloon Face was play
Its thin swelling calm blank surface
its changeless silly mock-skin surface
were a challenge to your art

But the balloon drifts away

Your strategy then
is to gently reclaim it
and hold it fast
and work with a tiny brush
and paint the face
and as the face materializes
witnesses will step forth
Of course the face is real
of course it isn't a private fantasy
we see it as clearly as you do

Still, the balloon drifts away

You take heart from their words
you are really quite encouraged by their words
for it is after all not a lie
though it *is* a balloon
You return to your meticulous work
determining the eyes' logic
the wise wry humor about the lips
You paint a face on a balloon
like this—

But the balloon drifts away

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You lunge forward
you reclaim it
you begin again
you must be very patient
though the face is not your own
still it is your labor
it *is* your own
You paint a face on a balloon
like this—

But the balloon drifts away

A Report To An Academy

No way out.
A three-sided cage nailed to a locker:
the ceiling against the nape of my neck,
the narrow sides cutting into my thighs.

Impossible to stand. Or to sit.
Impossible to sleep.
So I squatted in the cage, my knees trembling.

No way out. No way out.

Squatting in the cage.
Sobbing. No way out.
Picking at fleas. Sobbing.
Over and over the knowledge:
I have to find a way out or die.

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Freedom?
But no. Please do not misunderstand.
Esteemed ladies and gentlemen, please do not misunderstand.
Freedom was never a choice; only a way out.
Right or left. Or in any direction.
To get out somewhere, to get out!

Though it is difficult for you, ladies and gentlemen,
you must try to imagine a three-sided cage:
the ceiling against the nape of my neck,
the narrow sides cutting into my thighs,
the bars raising welts on my hide.

Bound for the zoological gardens where on Sundays
you and your delighted children would dawdle, grinning
and pointing, whistling, tossing peanuts into my cage,
or crusts of bread, or sharp stones.
Bound for the zoological garden and a more spacious cage
I saw that freedom was not a choice,
freedom is not a word in an ape's vocabulary.

Consequently I became one of you.

I had to find a way out of the cage or die.
So I became one of you. As you see.

The first thing I learned was a frank handshake,
which I practice every day.
Will you give me your hand?

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Irwin Shaw

The Art of Fiction IV, *continued*

Irwin Shaw was interviewed by this magazine in its infancy over twenty-five years ago. A resident expatriate author, he was a friend to the editors of the magazine in its early years in Paris, and has remained so since. It seemed appropriate to ask for an update to that interview. What follows will be incorporated with the original interview in the fifth volume of Writers at Work, *to be published by the Viking Press and due out this autumn.*

INTERVIEWER

You have lived in Europe for most of the years since the war, and since the first interview the magazine did with you. Are there advantages in being an expatriate writer?

SHAW

Those years did me a lot of good. First of all I had a great time. Secondly, the charge that I've become less American is ridiculous because I went back and forth all the time. I think I

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gained a whole lot of insight by living in Europe, and my books reflect it: *Lucy Crown,* for example, *Two Weeks in Another Town, Evening in Byzantium, Rich Man, Poor Man, Nightwork, Beggar Man, Thief,* would never have been written if it hadn't been for that European experience. Plus short stories like, "Tip on a Dead Jockey," "The Man Who Married a French Wife." All those came about because I was living in Europe. Besides, my life in New York was always more provincial than it ever was in Europe because I met only writers, editors, publishers, movie actors and directors, while in Europe I met a whole gamut of people: a writer is much more accepted socially in Europe. I met the Prime Minister of France, and he invited me for lunch. I met many ambassadors, though rarely any of our own. Also, living in a ski resort—as I do—you meet a wide variety of people because everybody somehow comes around to ski: paratroop captains from our army in Germany, Texas oil men, run-down Italian counts, hustlers, hot-shot athletes, politicians, racing-stable owners, all sorts of women from all over. You learn every language, hear every accent, and everything's all marvelously mixed up, which is a very useful thing for a writer to observe. And then, as you can hear from the way I speak, despite my years abroad, the precious sound of Brooklyn is still there in my voice. I can't stop being American. As for being an expatriate, you must remember that anybody with $300.00 in his pocket can come back to the United States whenever he wants.

INTERVIEWER

The first interview is especially acid about critics. Have your views changed over the years?

SHAW

My views naturally have mellowed. Most of the critics have been more or less kind to me, and the public has been most kind, and I reach my readers regardless of what the critics have written. So that, when I get a bad review now, it doesn't bother me as much as it once did.

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INTERVIEWER

Do you read the reviews of your books?

SHAW

Not much anymore, no. Not often. I sometimes glance at them, but I know that all writers are the same way. They forget a thousand good reviews and remember one bad one. Therefore, an excessive amount of spleen is vented on the one critic. You have to expect the raps, when you have achieved popularity as a writer, which in high literary circles is regarded as proof of venality and deliberate debasement of artistic standards. The popularity that I've enjoyed in the last few years has tended to soften the effect of critical blows. There was one critic I was very angry with, who came up to the party for Jim Jones' *Whistle*—after Jim had died—and I was in the receiving line. I put out my hand. He said, "You really want to shake my hand?" I said, "Sure. Forget it." But there are a couple of critics I won't forget from the so-called New York literary establishment, who have their own pets and standards, which I don't understand, and who have a tendency to either snub me or downgrade me. Naturally, I have some sharp things to say about them in the privacy of my own home. But I'd rather not say anything about them here, because the real juicy throat-cutting stories I'm saving for my memoirs.

INTERVIEWER

You have recently spoken of a Jewish cabal which is at the forefront of this country's critical evaluation. . . .

SHAW

Well, it's not really a Jewish cabal. . . . It's something that started in the old *Partisan Review,* and it just so happened that quite a few people were Jews, but it had nothing particularly to do with Jews. They were Trotskyites. Anyone who was at all political and not a Trotskyite, they considered a Stalinist. Unfortunately, they all wrote well and were maliciously entertaining. Then they became violent patriots during the war,

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though not one of them ever served in the armed services as far as I know. They didn't fight in the war. They didn't ever play football. They live in a dusty atmosphere of books and intrigue, and they don't like people like me who have entered more than they have into the mainstream of American life. And they've kept their lofty attitudes ever since. They and their disciples have gone out and worked for *Time Magazine,* and *Newsweek* and the *New York Review of Books* and even now in the Sunday *Times* book review section. They have a very haughty attitude towards people like me, mostly because —at least I think—my books sell a lot and people in general like them. They disregard all the great writers who were enormously popular like Dickens, Balzac, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, and for that matter Fitzgerald and Mark Twain and Hemingway. Anyway I don't let them bother me much. As I wrote somewhere, when writing about James Jones, "Posterity makes the judgments, not the *Saturday Review of Literature*—or the *New York Review of Books*—or even the Sunday *Times* book review section. There are going to be a lot of surprises in store for everybody."

INTERVIEWER

Do you think writers have it easier today than when you started out?

SHAW

In some ways they do, and then again they don't. When I started out, in the early 1930's, there were a great many magazines that published short stories. And writers of fiction, when they begin, are more likely to try the short form. At that time there was a great market for them, greater interest in the short story, and the young writer had a chance to practice his craft, to get criticism and meet with editors. Since that time, unfortunately, the short story market has dwindled to almost nothing, and that form of expression has become almost obsolete for all writers in America except those who are willing to publish in small magazines or those writers who have

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enough of a reputation so that they can use the limited space in two or three magazines throughout the country. However, from the point of view of finances, getting started as a writer has become more feasible. Although the number of newspapers has dwindled—and that used to be a field where a lot of beginning writers could serve their apprenticeship—there are many other forms that are lucrative. The chief one is television, which devours huge amounts of the written word, as do advertising and industry. The demand for quality in the writing in magazines like *Time, Newsweek,* etc., is attractive to bright young people of talent and the proliferation of special interest magazines offers a multitude of opportunities for financial security. However, those are dangerous places for writers to start in with because the money is good and the writing quickly falls into a routine and people who had started out as serious are very likely to find themselves in a financial as well as an artistic bind, since working in those mediums is an all-day, all-week job. And they are liable to find themselves artistically exhausted when they want to work on something of their own. On the other hand, in my experience I've found that if you're young enough, *any* kind of writing you do for a short period of time, up to two years, perhaps, is a marvelous apprenticeship. I told my son, who wanted to be a writer, that his newspaper experience—he was lucky enough to get four years of newspaper experience under demanding editors on the U.P.I. and the *Washington Post*—could only help him. But you must avoid giving hostages to fortune, like getting an expensive wife, an expensive house and a style of living that never lets you afford the time to take the chance to write what you wish. So that, while writers in general can make a living much more easily than when I first started in the 1930's, the serious writer who doesn't want to compromise at all, finds it much more difficult. Still, we're fortunate enough. The other day I got a contract from a magazine in Budapest. To reprint a short story of mine they agreed to pay me $50, out of which there would be deducted a 30% tax, a 10% agent's fee, and furthermore I was required to send at my own expense two

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books to some bureaucratic organization of the Hungarian government. You can imagine how well writers are doing in Budapest.

INTERVIEWER

How have you changed as writer since this interview in *The Paris Review* with you twenty-five years ago? Habits, energies, attitudes?

SHAW

My habits have remained more or less the same ever since I stopped writing for the theater. Writing for the theater, when you live among actors, you find yourself leading a nocturnal life. You're staying up until 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning, and you work at night more than you do in the day. Now that I'm away from the theater, I find I get up very early in the morning and for the most part, work four or five hours, then go out. I used to ski or play tennis, then come back about four or five o'clock and go over what I'd done. My attitudes have been changed, I imagine, but somebody would have to read all my books to find out how they have. I imagine that my characters have become much more complicated than when I first began, which would be normal. I've become more gentle in my irony. I'm liable to do more with failure and death. My attitude toward women is much less romantic than it was, which is also normal. I'm not as hopeful as I was when I was young. And I can see through trickery and cheating a lot better than I did back then, since I've been exposed to quite a bit of it and some lessons have seeped in. I've also become—naturally, since I have had a family now for a long time—much more involved in the relations between members of a family. In fact the book I'm doing now is just about that.

INTERVIEWER

Have your views changed since that first interview about the writer in America?

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SHAW

Yes, they have, because times have changed. First of all, when I gave that interview it was at the height of the McCarthy period when writers *were* being hounded. After that, remember, we had Kennedy, and Kennedy was a man who liked writers and even *I* got invited to the White House. Also, Ernest Hemingway did a great deal toward making the writer an acceptable public figure; obviously he was no sissy. He was a he-man. He made money by his trade, his art. He knew everybody. He moved in very aristocratic and socially acceptable circles. So that helped a great deal. Also, today there are so many more writers. Everybody knows somebody who is writing for television or for the movies. They get much more publicity. People write about them as human beings much more than they used to, and so that has changed. Of course, it hasn't changed completely. A couple of years ago in Switzerland, a gentleman in the insurance business, an American, came to me and he said, "You live here?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, what do you *do*?" I said, "I'm a writer." He said, "Yes, I know. But what do you do for a *living*?" But that attitude has changed somewhat. I don't think that the writer anymore is regarded as a freak by Americans. What I said then was accurate, but now no longer is.

INTERVIEWER

If a writer's powers do diminish over a period of time, in what areas does this seem to occur?

SHAW

Since, by all rights, my powers should be in full flood of diminishment, that's a hard question for me to answer honestly. I think that for myself I write with the same enthusiasm—if not with the same speed. I find myself re-doing things much more than I did then. But, remember, that is a particularly American question, because in Europe a writer is supposed to improve up until he's about seventy-five. Europeans seem to have a career curve that's much more regular

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than that of Americans. . . there are very few flash-in-the-pans in Europe, especially among writers. In America we have the feeling of the doomed young artist. Fitzgerald was the great example of that, who started losing his power at the age of twenty-nine, according to the critics. The fact that he didn't was only found out posthumously. But unless a man becomes an alcoholic or is tormented by life in a terrible way, he shouldn't lose his powers as he grows older. For example, Isaac Singer is 75 years old and although he was born in Poland and doesn't write in English, still he's an American, and he's going as strong as ever. He should be a model for us all. People who light up like Roman candles come down in the dark very quickly. Curiously, the United States is just full of writers who have one big work in their life, and that's all. Tom Hagen killed himself after *Mr. Roberts*. So did Ross Lockridge after *Raintree County*.

INTERVIEWER

Could it be that some writers really only have one book in them. . . and writer's block is simply an excuse?

SHAW

I don't think so. The great writers—Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Dickens, Meredith, Thackeray—just kept bringing them out. They didn't care if they repeated themselves. It didn't bother them that they wrote echoes. We seem to go by a different timing mechanism than these writers. The only man who wrote a great deal in our time was John O'Hara, because he went on the wagon and had nothing else to do. I've gone on the wagon, but my body doesn't believe it. It's waiting for that whiskey to get in there. . . to get me going. I never drink while I'm working, but after a few glasses, I get ideas that would never have occurred to me dead sober. And some of the ideas turn out to be valuable the next day. Some not.

INTERVIEWER

How important to a writer are the adjutants to the profes-

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sion: editor, publisher, agent?

SHAW

That depends very largely upon the writer. I know writers, very good ones, who lean upon their editors very heavily. There's no onus attached to that, but they want constant reassurance. They are doubtful about their own directions, and they often go to their editors while writing a book for help. I, on the other hand, never show anything to anybody until I've finished it. The only exception I've made to that is my son, because he represents a whole new generation; when I write about young people I want to see whether I'm getting it straight or not. Editors can be very useful. I had a great editor, Saxe Cummins at Random House, who helped me cut more than 100,000 words out of *The Young Lions*. If I had kept it in it might have been a terrible flop. The editors I had at the *New Yorker* quietly helped me in peculiar, small ways. One thing they taught me was the value of cutting out the last paragraph of stories, something I pass down as a tip to all writers. The last paragraph in which you tell what the story is about is almost always best left out. The editors I have now are valuable in other ways, occasionally pointing out something they think is a weakness and in getting things straight. In the novel it's hard to keep track of everybody. They also help keep a hold on reality. They say, "That street didn't run that way." For example, in "The Sailor off the Bremen" I described a walk down into Greenwich Village in which a beating took place near the women's YWCA. My poor editor at the *New Yorker* took the time to walk down and time it and come back and tell me I had done it correctly. Also I wrote a story about North Africa during the war—this was *before* I got to North Africa—and I described it as hot, with everybody suffering from the heat. The editors found out just before publication that in the early days of the invasion it had been cold and blustery and everybody was freezing. An editor for prose isn't as important as an editor, say, for film, where the whole thing can be changed by an editor. But the most brilliant example of that in

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our time, I think, was Ezra Pound's editing of "The Waste-land," which made the poem infinitely better. Well, there are very few people like Pound around and very few people like T.S. Eliot who'll listen. So I don't hope for that.

The writer works in a lonely way, and these people who work around him are supportive and useful in a general way. Publishers. Agents. I had a very nice agent, a long time ago, who approved of my stuff and sold my short stories. But once she said, "I don't think this short story you sent in to me is right. I think you should do this and that to it." So I said, "My dear young lady, you have one job, which is selling my stories, and I have another job, which is writing them. Let's you stick to your job, and I'll stick to mine." My present agent, Irving P. Lazar, does a very good job of selling my work, but I get no criticism from him, which is a happy combination for both of us. Irving is famous, you know, not only as an agent but for his fear of germs. He'll ask the hotel concierge for twenty towels to put between his bed and his bathroom so that after a shower he can walk back into the bedroom on a path of towels. At the Hotel Chantaco, in St. Jean de Luz, he used up so many towels that the concierge called him on the phone and asked him to leave, which got Swifty so angry he took all the towels and threw them over the balcony. Once, he and Howard Hughes, who was also nuts about germs, found themselves in the men's room of a casino in Las Vegas, and it became a question of which one was going to risk opening the door for the other; in normal circumstances either would push the door with his *shoulder* rather than risk contamination by using his hands. Both tried to outwait the other. They'd be in there to this day if someone had not pushed the door to come in, and both men were able to slip out without touching anything at all.

INTERVIEWER

Could we ask: what are the writer's responsibilities to his talent compared to his responsibilities to his state of well-being, his family?

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SHAW

Well, a writer is a human being. He has to live with a sense of honor. If when I got out of college I had abandoned my family to starvation, which is just about where we were, I think I'd have been a much worse writer. I know that the romantic idea is that everybody around a writer must suffer for his talent. But I think that a writer is a citizen (which is one of the reasons I went into the war), that he's a part of humanity, part of his nation, part of his family. He may have to make some compromises.

INTERVIEWER

Why did you eventually stop writing for the *New Yorker?*

SHAW

Because my friends on it, my editors, died, and I didn't like the policy of the new people who came in. It's a very good magazine, but I felt that I had either outgrown it or fallen behind it. I think there would be differences of opinion there. They've tried to get me to write for them again, since 1952, when I quit, but I just didn't feel that I belonged there anymore, although I like many of their short stories. My favorite short story writer is John Cheever, who writes for them all the time. But it's not within my field anymore. I found that I could publish the stories I wanted to write other places. The *New Yorker* has been very hospitable to me. I had great editors there, starting with Woolcott Gibbs, William Maxwell, Gus Lobrano and above all—Harold Ross.

INTERVIEWER

What constitutes a good editor?

SHAW

A good editor is a man who understands what you're talking and writing about and doesn't meddle too much. A good editor can put his finger on a weakness or on a *longeur* or on a failure in development, without trying to tell you how to repair

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it. That was the one thing the *New Yorker* never tried to do with me. They never tried to rewrite me. There were times when they said, "Well, we don't like the story this way, but if you change it in a certain way we'll take it." Occasionally their ideas were acceptable, and at other times I'd say, "Nothing doing," and I'd publish the story someplace else. For example, "The Eighty Yard Run" was first submitted to the *New Yorker,* and they turned it down. Another story that became quite famous, "Night Birth and Opinion," which got the best reviews in the book of short stories in which it was included, was turned down. Editors are not infallible. Also, sometimes the prejudices of the group of editors might militate against a certain kind of story. The *New Yorker* editors are the least athletic group of people I've ever seen, and also they were against violence, although they did publish "The Sailor Off the Bremen," which is the first long story they ever published and the first politically serious story they'd ever accepted.

INTERVIEWER

Didn't that particular story have something to do with a change in their policy toward short stories?

SHAW

It did indeed. That was the first really serious story they published, and the first time they published a story that long. Now they publish stories 20,000 words long. I was very grateful to them for doing "Sailor Off the Bremen," especially since I'd already sent if off to *Esquire,* and had told the *New Yorker* the story wasn't for them. But the editors wormed it out of me, and both *Esquire* and the *New Yorker* chose it the same day, which put me in an ethical predicament, since to submit a manuscript to more than one publisher at a time in those days was considered immoral on the part of the writer. But I preferred at that moment to have it in the *New Yorker,* and that's what I did.

INTERVIEWER

It's true, isn't it, that you wrote "Sailor Off the Bremen"

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and "The Girls in Their Summer Dresses," perhaps your most famous short stories, in one week? You were twenty-five. You wrote "The Girls in Their Summer Dresses" on one afternoon, I think you told me.

SHAW

Morning.

INTERVIEWER

Morning. You left it on the kitchen table, and your wife, Marian, tossed it out the window.

SHAW

Well, that's not quite how it happened. We had one room up on the twenty-eighth floor of this hotel on 8th Avenue, both busted. We were waiting for the rehearsals of *The Gentle People* to start. I wrote "The Girls in Their Summer Dresses" one morning while Marian was lying in bed and reading. And I knew I had something good there, but I didn't want her to read it, knowing that the reaction would be violent, to say the least, because it's about a man who tells his wife that he's going to be unfaithful to her. So I turned it face down, and I said, "Don't read this yet. It's not ready." It was the only copy I had. Then I went out and took a walk, had a drink, and came back. She was raging around the room. She said, "It's a lucky thing you came back just now, because I was going to open the window and throw it out." Since then she's become reconciled to it, and I think she reads it with pleasure, too.

INTERVIEWER

Could you tell us something about Harold Ross of the *New Yorker?*

SHAW

Ross pretended that he was a ruffian and an ignoramus, and he would send back my copy with all sorts of queries saying, "What does this mean? I can't find this word in the diction-

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ary." But he only did it in the interest of clarity—he liked lucid prose—and I'd go in with Lobrano, the editor, mostly, and we'd fight it out. Sometimes Ross would say, "Well, I don't understand this story at all, but if you guys like it so much, it's gonna be in."

He was a wonderful fellow and a very good friend and marvelous to be with, and I missed him enormously when he died. He could learn to change, which is why the *New Yorker* is still going strong after its dilletantish beginnings. When you think its first cover was the fop with the monocle looking at a butterfly, and they wound up publishing *In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote and *Hiroshima* by John Hersey, you can see the ability to grow that made Ross and made the magazine.

INTERVIEWER

Do you see any change or progression in your own approach to fiction these days? What does one learn regarding technique, say, as one becomes older and more experienced? Does one stick to a formula that apparently works?

SHAW

Well, as you can see from the variety of things I've written, I haven't stuck upon any formula. In a previous interview I said that when I was young, I tried to write each story, each play, each novel in the style suitable to the material and not in a style that could be recognized just as mine. However, that's a very hard purpose to fulfil. In most great writing in America and elsewhere, writers stick to the same style, like William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway. But I wanted to be more various. That may have come about because of my training in the theatre, where characters have to cut the umbilical cord from the writer and talk in their own voices. Of course, the master of that was James Joyce. He could sound like anybody, and did. But we're not all Joyces.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have any general opinion about young writers

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starting off?

SHAW

So many young writers I've met are uneducated. They don't read. They don't read what started things . . . produced the trends. They don't know the classics. If they become enthusiastic, it's about someone like Kurt Vonnegut, who is uncopyable. If they try to copy him, they're in for disaster.

INTERVIEWER

What words of advice would you offer them?

SHAW

Keep going. Writing is finally play, and there's no reason why you should get paid for playing. If you're a real writer, you write no matter what. No writer need feel sorry for himself if he writes, and enjoys the writing, even if he doesn't get paid for it.

INTERVIEWER

Why do writers protest so much that writing is no fun at all; they complain about the agonies of creation?

SHAW

I don't believe them. What do they do it for, then? Writing is like a contact sport, like football. Why do kids play football? They can get hurt on any play, can't they? Yet they can't wait until Saturday comes around so they can play on the high school team, or the college team, and get smashed around. Writing is like that. You can get hurt, but you enjoy it.

—WILLIE MORRIS
—LUCAS MATTHIESSEN

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Holland

Mary Morris

My great-aunt Eva had patience as if she could wait for eternity; that was why, when she died, mean and ugly and absorbed by her pain, and we buried her in the family plot in an August heat wave, everyone was surprised. No one ever expected her to die, or to change in any way. With both of our parents working when we were children, my four brothers and I spent most of our days growing up at great-aunt Eva's. She was a spinster and looking back, I feel certain, a virgin. Indeed, she seemed a fortress of virginity, but, perhaps because she was proud, taciturn, and ultimately strange, an archive of family rumors surrounded her.

According to legend, she had fallen in love with a man named Jake when she was eighteen. He lived on the outskirts of town, near the rural districts, and Eva and her family lived to the the north, some miles away in the heart of the city. Every Sunday Jake rode from the south where the rural districts began to the north to pick up Eva in his buggie. Eva dressed in her finest taffeta with a muff and a veil regardless

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of the weather and, at one o'clock sharp, his buggie arrived out front. He never phoned because they had no phone, and he never wrote. He never came inside, except once, the first time he picked her up, but never again after that time. It was simply the arrangement as everyone understood it and it continued for nine years, almost driving Eva's father into the grave. Until one Sunday Jake didn't arrive. Eva went into her room and shut the door. Every Sunday thereafter until just before she died, she'd go into her room and shut the door for the entire afternoon, emerging just when the sun began to go down, because that was the hour when Jake's carriage had always brought her home. Occasionally, she called my grandmother into the room and she asked my grandmother how she looked. Because Eva was always dressed each Sunday in her muff and veil, prepared to depart. When I was born and growing up mostly at Eva's house, I never once went there on a Sunday because that was her day with Jake.

My mother worked in a bakery, making sweet-smelling breads and my father worked at the city dump. Their work was as diametrically opposed as their personalities were; they weren't unhappy, just opposed. So the first seven years of my life and my brothers' were spent at Eva's because when our parents weren't working, they were fighting and because no one else in the family volunteered for the job.

Perhaps because of her years waiting for Jake, Eva was very patient with us, even though she would never have children of her own. If we fought among ourselves or cried over some minor injustice, she had a sure-fire remedy which she employed only in extreme cases. "You are not behaving," she'd say, "so it will have to be the supreme punishment for bad children."

Great-aunt Eva led us into the back room. Her dressing table had piles of ivory and tortoise shell combs, ivory-set nail buffers and black silk fans, and the hat pins she'd collected stuck into a tomato-shaped pincushion. There was always the faint odor of a woman about the place which came from the dozens of small colored bottles containing hair oils and stale

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perfumes. There was also the scent of cedar because all the hats and boas and skirts were kept in the cedar closet. And there was the brass elephant with the chipped tusks, though he disappeared just before she died and was not found until years later, buried in the garden, where we assumed Eva had buried him. In the top drawer of the dresser were perhaps a dozen hand mirrors with petitpoint embroidery on their backs and on the side of the dresser was a magazine rack which contained copies of *Vogue* from the 1920's. Though we knew all of these objects in Eva's dressing room by heart, none of them was the supreme punishment. She pointed at the various objects until we had to plead with her to get it down from where it was hidden on the uppermost shelves behind the hats.

She stood on the step ladder, fumbled for a while, talking to herself, until she produced a small glass object that fit into the palm of her hand. Inside a boy and a girl were on a seesaw, their backs turned to us so that we never saw their faces. Both wore wooden shoes and were in front of a gingerbread-type house. The girl wore a blue jumper and a hat and had long braids and the boy wore puffy trousers, a red vest and a blue sailor's cap. Eva shook the paperweight so that a snowstorm began, even in the middle of summer, and blue and white flakes fell slowly, making the seesaw go up and down and we stopped fighting and started betting on whether the boy or the girl would be higher when the blizzard ceased. Then Eva pointed to the word, inscribed beneath that self-contained snowstorm, and, even though most of us could not yet read, we all knew what was written and we said the word in unison as if recognizing it for the first time: it read "Holland."

Years later, I remembered my first love. Most of us, it seems, fall in love for the first time, not in response to the totality of an individual, because this requires too much thought and we might never manage to fall in love, but rather in response to some detail about his or her person. It's

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the love of this detail which permits us to love with abandon. For a woman, it might be the flex of the biceps, the sincerity or lack of sincerity of a smile, the promise of a Harvard degree. I was immune to all of these, due perhaps to an abundance of brothers. Instead, I fell hopelessly, and, as Brice would add, pathetically, in love at the age of seventeen with a totally inappropriate object for my affections, an overgrown Swede named Holland Bjorstrom.

He was built like a sequoia, and towered over me, hardly fitting straight-on through a doorway. His eyes were the color of maple syrup and I never saw him crack a smile or say an intelligent word in the three years I loved him. So it must have been the name. My brothers could not tolerate him. Because he was so large, he was unusually ugly, but they did not hold that against him. Brice would have nothing to do with him because he was prematurely bald and Brice had been born with a fear of aging. Stephen, my middle brother, wanted nothing to do with him because he insisted on playing tennis and could never so much as tap the ball without having it sail over the fence. Joshua, my third brother, was indifferent to anyone who couldn't play chess, and James, the baby, was intrigued with Holland as one might be with a brontosaurus.

I had a slightly different problem with Holland. He was an umbrella salesman. Actually he helped manage his family's rainwear factory and would someday take over the company and become a very wealthy man. It was not easy to find topics of interest to discuss with an umbrella salesman. We talked about rain as much as we could. Holland had as many different terms for rain as bedouins for camel dung. There were light drizzles, soft drizzles, spring drizzles, threatening drizzles, normal drizzles and dry drizzles which I never managed to identify. There were downpours and deluges, drenchings and hurricanes, precipitations and evaporations, fogs and smogs and mists (which came close to dry drizzles) and dews, thunderstorms, lightning storms, electrical storms, Nor'easters, sleet and hail, April showers and flash floods, light rains,

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heavy rains, monsoons and then, though he said it was very rare, just plain rain. If Holland ever revealed to me a glimmer of his experiencing pleasure, it was when it rained. What others bemoaned, he applauded. What ruined the best planned picnics and the most awaited softball games, he rejoiced in. Rain to Holland was money in the bank; he prayed for floating currency, for liquid assets and cash flow.

Eva used to say that she wanted to go to Holland because Holland had been good to the Jews during the Second World War. Eva's father had been Jewish and she considered herself to be a Jew. She said that in Holland the king had put a Jewish star on his sleeve when Hitler said all the Jews must wear stars. No one except Brice, because he believed in truth above everything else, ever took the trouble of correcting her. He said time after time that it was not a king from Holland but King Christian of Denmark and he didn't really wear a star; it was just a rumor.

Eva would hear nothing of this. For her, history's only function was the molding of events to support the idea. We suspected that Holland had something to do with Jake and that it must have been Jake who gave her that paperweight because she was loyal to its word as if to some oath. As the years went by, she grew more and more adamant that it was the Dutch who saved the Jews, that the Dutch had even made a significant contribution to the ending of the World War, that Hans Brinker really skated on silver skates and saved the city by putting a finger in a dike.

One winter she bought us skates which she spray-painted silver in the garage and we were supposed to skate along the Wisconsin border a mile from where we were living. On U.S. 78 to be specific. A state trooper brought us home and Eva cursed at him from the back room. She took us on the side streets and had us skate there. She took us down to the Fox River in March and we skated but James fell through the ice where it had thawed. That was when Mother decided Eva was getting too old to handle us much any more. So we saw

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less and less of her and since we were in school, there was no reason to spend much time at her house. As we grew older, eating dutch chocolate and going dutch on dates became jokes among us. Eva still talked about Amsterdam as if she had lived there all her life, as if tulips blossomed all year right on the canals like lily pads. Once a year, as soon as Brice was old enough to drive, we piled into the car and drove two hundred miles to the tulip festival in Holland, Michigan and we would bring back as many tulip bulbs and flowers as we could load into the car and afford. That was the only thing we really ever did for Eva.

She planted the bulbs out back and put so many bunches of tulips into water in the house that she had to fill the goldfish bowl which was always stocked with goldfish, some of which managed to live for several years. The fish swam, darting through the tulip stems like slalom skiers.

Eva never once mentioned the man we all knew she waited for each Sunday. Never uttered his name or offered a word of explanation or ever referred to Sunday or what she did on that day. My grandmother said that they had never known Jake's last name or where they had met or what he did or why he stopped coming to the house. Only once did I hear of Eva confiding, and that was to me, her feelings about men. She had heard through Brice that I was heart-sick over a breakup between myself and "some leviathan."

Eva took me aside one afternoon and told me that she had been surprised to learn that there had been any such romance going on and she was shocked to learn that I had been behaving in this manner for at least three years. "Did he touch you?" she asked. I shook my head. I wasn't lying; I am certain that touching never crossed Holland's mind. "That's good." A smile broke across her features, spreading to maniacal proportions, "because if a man touches a woman's body, her whole body disintegrates." The dark circles beneath her eyes seemed to darken, her hand trembled as she placed it on my shoulder. "Her body crumbles to nothing. To waste.

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Even in marriage, there is no escape." I had been warned against premarital relations but never with the threat of disintegration and never had I been warned against a husband's touch. She grabbed me as firmly as she could on both shoulders. "Promise me," she said, "promise me, that a man will never touch you." I looked into her eyes. They were filled with rage; and so I promised, the way a politician will promise something that he would like to keep but knows is impossible so he hopes that, in the face of future promises kept, this first one, will be forgotten or at least forgiven.

Though Eva did not speak of Jake, she did speak about the man whom she claimed had been the inspiration for the purchase of the paperweight. It was the story she gave and, whether it was true or not, we came to understand that she believed it was true. When she was a very young girl, she said, she had been introduced to John Holland, a Dutchman, the famous inventor and designer of submarines. She said she had been introduced to him before nature had made her a woman and that he had immediately asked our great-grandfather for her hand when she came of age. Brice, who did eventually become a newspaperman, the profession which seemed to best suit his thirst for truth and seemingly paradoxical love for the sensational, checked the facts. John Holland had been an Irishman, not a Dutchman. He had been happily married for years and with one foot in the grave when Eva claimed he made his proposal.

Eva was never quite able to explain to anyone's satisfaction how it was that she had come to meet the inventor of submarines or to verify that it was she who had turned him down because she was then in love with a young British soldier. Eva said she met him in their house in Kensington where she had lived for a year with her father and her youngest brothers and sisters while the family was in the process of migrating to America. Her father, an engineer, knew many interesting people in London and John Holland had been one of them. One day he had glimpsed her in the parlor and the next day he came calling. He walked up the steps in a black mourning

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coat and top hat with an umbrella tucked under his arm, even though there was no sign of rain, and asked if Miss Eva were at home, that was how they had known he was a gentleman.

I met my husband on a ski slope in Vermont. Actually I did not meet him on the slope. I was skiing down the mountain and he was going up on a rope tow. He observed me skiing off the trail, into the woods and disappearing behind a grove of trees. A blizzard had begun and it was almost an hour's time down the mountain so he did not feel it would be rude to help. He left the rope tow and skiied over. He found me with my skis locked and crossed at the ankles, my bindings not released, unable to turn over. He picked me up, straightened my skis and brushed the snow from my legs. He led me out of the woods, back on to the trail. By now the blizzard seemed in earnest. Enormous flakes of blue-white snow fell around us and we were unable to see more than a few feet in front of us. He suggested we complete the run together. I told him that I had been out over an hour and a half and that now my feet were numb.

We wended our way slowly along a narrow path. I followed his bright red parka and his blue cap as he turned and dipped. When we reached the lodge, he removed my boots because my hands were too numb. He packed my toes, which were very white in snow that he collected from outside. He put my hands in ice water that he took from the cafeteria. The pain of the blood returning tc my limbs was excruciating and he rubbed my neck to help me relax. After a few minutes, he massaged very gently my feet and hands. He brought me hot chocolate and continued working on my fingers and toes until the pain was gone. I never recovered the sensation in two of my toes.

We checked our gear and went into the bar. It was already getting dark and the sun was setting. A stark red crimson crept over the land, turning the snow into mountains of pink. The storm had settled. In the bar we sat by the fire with a

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view of the mountains, sipping glass after glass of Irish coffee. We were getting drunk. It occurred to us, when it was finally dark outside, that we hadn't exchanged names. I told him mine and he said his was John, but his good friends call him Jack. He spoke it softly so that the sound of the word was almost indistinguishable from the crackling of the fire and I had to lean very far forward in order to hear. It was Jack, not Jake, but that was close enough for me and I made a mental note that I would not go out with him for more than six months unless he seemed honest in his intentions and that somehow I'd expiate the lifelong sufferings of my great-aunt Eva.

When I took Jack home to the Midwest to meet my family, great-aunt Eva shut herself in her room and refused to see us. Whereas the rest of the family had a warm reception, Eva'd not leave her room.

I pounded on the door and told her that I had loved her more than anyone else had loved her and more than I had loved anyone when I was a child. I told her that I was moving East and she would not see me for some time. I told her that Jack was upset by her behavior, which he was, and that everyone would soon be fighting on her account. My pleas went unheeded. Patience, it seems, has another side, and Eva's, when it turned sour, became an impenetrable stubbornness, a wall which she now effectively constructed between herself and the world. This childless, husbandless woman who, without bitterness, had reared five children without laying a hand on them, whose most extreme punishment was the soporific effect of a snowstorm in a paperweight, had closed the door on me. The night before our wedding, I pounded once more on the door, exhausted and drained from my efforts. It was then that I heard what sounded like a scratching, a tiny rasping noise coming from behind me. I pressed my ear to the door and all I was able to decipher were the words "a promise is a promise" and those were Eva's last spoken words to me.

On the day of our wedding, she still did not emerge but

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stayed in her room, Brice told me, until we were several hundred miles away; and then when she finally did leave her room, she was dressed in deep mourning, a long black dress, black veil and gloves, and she wore that costume until the day she died. They were never certain for what or for whom she was mourning. But if my name were spoken, she whispered "harlot" or "strumpet" or "hussy" under her breath, just loud enough so that my brother Joshua would hear and that would drive him in a rage from the house and she would sit, laughing to herself.

Once, perhaps in a moment of weakness, she clasped Stephen's hand, lifted her veil, and sighed, saying that she had received a telegram and that the man who used to come calling on her had died. For once, apparently, Brice didn't bother refuting the fact that no telegram had arrived. Whether Jake had died or not, and perhaps somehow she did know, she never locked herself in her room again on a Sunday, but she sat gazing out the window in the parlor. Whether or not the Dutch saved the Jews or she had met a man named John Holland or received a telegram, one thing was certain. Eva was dying.

Her hair turned silver in a matter of weeks. Her face which had been smooth and sculpted assumed a permanent, wrinkled frown. She grew strange. All books, papers and pencils had to be placed at right angles. The television was kept on at all times but no sound was allowed. If someone wanted to hear the news, they had to wait until Eva was sound asleep. She shut the cat in the fruit cellar until he nearly died of starvation and James finally found him, a shadow of his former self. She yelled if anyone left a fingerprint on a table or made a lampshade or painting crooked, but while she shrieked at fingerprints, she would not permit dusting. She refused to open the mail. She screamed at all solicitors and cancelled her milk deliveries. And, in the final act of defiance, she killed off all her goldfish one-by-one, those fish that had swum between tulip stems, by spearing them with her antique hatpins that she kept in the tomato-

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shaped pin cushion.

She refused to eat anything that was not chocolate or had chocolate in it and they had to invent the most disgusting concoctions in order to persuade her to eat something that resembled a balanced meal. She gave up sleeping and developed bistre circles like half-moons beneath her eyes and she would dooze off at dinner or in the middle of a sentence when she could not keep her eyes open any longer but in five or ten minutes she would waken with a start and curse herself for letting go. Late at night, when the rest of the town was probably sound asleep, Brice would see the light shining beneath her door and he knew that inside Eva was sitting up, reading the book she had requested from the library—a pictorial history of submarines.

Almost two years later, long after I had relinquished any hope of hearing from Eva again, assured by my husband that she was mad, senile or both, I received a letter. I was pregnant with my first child and surprised to see the shaky scrawl on the envelope, like a child's scribblings. I removed the letter from the envelope. "If it's a girl," she had written, "don't name her Eva."

One morning, the boys told me, she rose from her sickbed and went to a drawer in the back room and took out a stash of money which she had hidden away. She put the money into piles and told the boys to whom each of the piles would go and that this money had not been designated in her will. I was not mentioned. Then she found a bag of sewing and darned some socks and sewed on some buttons. She dusted and made a list of repairs that would have to be done. She straightened out the dresser and arranged her room so that it was exactly as it had been some sixty years before when Jake came calling. Then she went into the parlor and told the boys that she needed some sleep and they should wake her in an hour.

The funeral was simple and sad but no one cried except for my grandmother and me. When the casket was being

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lowered, James kicked the ground, called Eva an old nut and walked away. Joshua chewed gum throughout the entire ceremony. Brice and Stephen were off to the courts as soon as the first shovelfuls of dirt were dropped down. My mother complained of the heat and my father rocked back and forth on the balls of his feet. When I returned after a week at home, Jack met me at LaGuardia. He took my bags, kissed me perfunctorily on the cheek and muttered something about it being a waste of good money to do homage to a fool. We drove back on that hot August afternoon in silence, while our daughter slept soundly in the back. Once I put my hand on his knee but I felt him go tense and I took the hand away.

We entered the Holland Tunnel. Traffic was bumper to bumper. Cars were backed up behind us for miles it seemed, ahead of us we could not tell how far. We leaned back in our seats. We moved slowly, like a battalion, deeper and deeper into the tunnel.

The tunnel was a yellow-gray. Its heat seemed visible, swaying in waves like a snake. Motorists were impatient, honking, leaning out of their windows. It was difficult to breathe. I thought of Eva in her small, narrow, subterranean cave. I thought of the light that shone beneath her door those nights when she would not sleep and spent hours pouring over the history of submarines. Not dreaming of their inventor but studying those narrow machines, learning every hatch.

We had not moved for some time and Jack was slow to tell me that we were stalled. He said not to panic because all around us cars were stalled, overheated like us, or just plain tired, and that we would need a tow. I panic in small places. I always have. I have told Jack that I want a burial at sea, my body floating freely among fishes, a snack for spawning blue fish. That I would sprout gills and reign immortal, but he should never close me up in the ground.

"Well, did the old lady leave you anything?" Jack asked, trying to make conversation. I could not fault his dislike of Eva. He had never seen the woman, never spoken to her. He

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had not spent years listening to the rumors which only her mysterious and self-imposed silence evoked, rumors which perhaps all had some truth in them, though none had all the truth which Brice hungered after, and that truth had died as intact as I believed Eva's body had been. Surely no man had brought about its disintegration.

Her final words for me had been to the point. She did not mention me by name or say what it was she was leaving me but no one contested it. The lawyer read, "And to my great-niece, the supreme punishment for bad children." And then he shrugged his shoulders and asked if anyone could explain to what or to whom the deceased had referred.

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NOTICE

Readers of the last issue of *The Paris Review* may have been puzzled by Max Apple's contribution, "The Four Apples," and possibly by the story immediately following it, which was called "Animal Scary Scary," by one Jessica Apple and marked by a strong anti-zoo attitude. It should be mentioned that Mr. Apple's story was one of a number commissioned by the Rolling Stone Press for a volume of short stories for children by front-line writers, and that Mr. Apple—perhaps to show how competitive the field was—along with his own contribution sent an example of his very young (5) daughter, Jessica. The Rolling Stone Press decided not to publish Jessica's story, but it did appear (without explanation) in #74 of *The Paris Review*. Thus Jessica Apple is quite likely the youngest ever to contribute to the literary magazine world. . . and she is welcome to announce this whenever she feels it appropriate—perhaps when her teacher makes the mistake of marking her a C- on the class assignment of What I Did On My Vacation.

On a sadder note: word has come to this magazine of the death of James Blake, one of our important contributors. Blake spent a considerable part of his life in the Florida prison system. His work came to our notice through Nelson Algren with whom Blake had corresponded from jail. A volume of his letters entitled *The Joint* was published by The Paris Review Editions/ Doubleday in 1972. His short stories appeared in the magazine. He came to call on occasion. The undersigned will remember him at the 1968 Paris Review fund-raising revel on Welfare Island—now Roosevelt Island—in the East River. At the end of evening he was playing a kind of uncertain whorehouse jazz on a stand-up piano set out in a glade. A soft rain had begun to fall (it eventually ruined the two pianos left outside and wiped out the profits accruing from the revel)—a lonely figure hunched over the keys, oblivious of the misty rain, and the great Manhattan skyline glowing across the river behind him.

He wrote wonderfully about a life that was more often unpleasant than not, its vicissitudes, and the pleasures that came along all too rarely.

—G.A.P.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

Andre Dubus teaches at Bradford College in Bradford, Massachusetts. He was the recipient of a Guggenheim Grant for Fiction in 1976-7. He has published a novel, *The Lieutenant* (1967) and two books of short stories, *Separate Flights* (David R. Godine, 1975) and *Adultery and Other Choices* (Godine, 1977). "Waiting" will appear in a collection, *Killings*, to be published by Godine in 1979.

Scott Elledge is twenty-one and a native of Burlington, Iowa. He is a student at the University of Iowa where he is a General Studies major. His work will also appear soon in the *Colorado Quarterly* and other magazines.

Barbara Milton was born in Missouri. She lives and writes in New York City.

Mary Morris is completing a novel in Mexico this year on a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. Her first book of short stories, *Vanishing Animals and Other Stories*, will be published next fall by David Godine.

POETRY

George Bradley, who graduated from Yale in 1975, lives in Sagaponack, Long Island. His work has appeared in the *American Review, Shenandoah, American Poetry Review, Poetry,* and elsewhere.

Jorie Graham teaches at Murray State University in Kentucky. Her poems have been published in *Antaeus, The Nation, Ironwood,* etc.

Allen Grossman's book *The Woman On the Bridge Over the Chicago River,* will be published this year by New Directions. He teaches English at Brandeis.

Thom Gunn's latest book is *Jack Straw's Castle and Other Poems* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1976). He lives in San Francisco.

Seamus Heaney is teaching this spring at Harvard. Farrar, Straus & Giroux will publish a new collection of poems, *Field Work,* this fall.

Lewis Hyde's translation of the selected poems of Vincente Aleixandre, *A Longing for The Light,* has just been published by Harper & Row. He is at work on *The Gift,* a book that explores the fate of the imagination in a market economy, and lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Margaret Kent is a student in the M.F.A. program at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. She won the 1978 Amon Liner Poetry Award of *The Greensboro Review.*

Miriam Levine is the author of *To Know We Are Living* (Decatur House Press, Washington) and is currently completing a new collection of poems, *Silk.* She lives in Arlington, Mass.

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Herbert Morris's poems have been appearing in *The Paris Review* since issue #13. He lives in Philadelphia.

Alan Nadel teaches at Douglass College of Rutgers University. His poems and articles on poets have appeared in a number of journals.

Joyce Carol Oates teaches at Princeton. In 1978 she published *Son of the Morning*, a novel, and *Women Whose Lives Are Food, Men Whose Lives Are Money*, a book of poems.

Octavio Paz, born 1914, currently has three books of poetry available in English translation: *Early Poems*, *Configurations* and *Eagle or Sun?* A volume of new poetry is forthcoming from New Directions. His prose works include *Children of the Mire; Alternating Current; The Labyrinth of Solitude; The Siren and the Seashell; The Bow and the Lyre; Marcel Duchamp; Claude-Levi-Strauss* and *Conjunctions and Disjunctions.*

John Peck won the 1978 Rome Prize of the National Academy-Institute of Arts and Letters. David Godine published a chapbook, *The Broken Blockhouse Wall*, in 1978.

John Peech is doing postdoctoral research in physics at Cornell.

Joyce Peseroff's book, *The Hardness Scale*, was published by Alice James Books. She is co-editor of *Greenhouse* and lives in Dedham, Mass.

Jayne Anne Phillips teaches English at Humboldt State University in California. A collection of her short fiction will be published this fall by Seymour Lawrence.

John Ramington's poems have appeared in *American Review, The New Republic, The Texas Quarterly*, and elsewhere. He is currently living in New Orleans and writing a novel.

Liam Rector was recently a teaching fellow at Johns Hopkins and currently directs the Folger Shakespeare Library poetry series. His work has appeared in *Partisan Review, Shenandoah, Black Box, Aleph, etc.*

Florence Rubenfeld is working on a dissertation on contemporary American poetry at the University of Iowa.

David St. John is the author of *Hush* (Houghton Mifflin, 1976). He teaches in the Writing Seminars at Johns Hopkins, and is currently writing and traveling on a Guggenheim Fellowship.

Sherod Santos is completing a Ph.D. at the University of Utah. A winner of a 1977 "Discovery/The Nation" award, he has published poems in *Poetry, Quarterly West, Antaeus*, etc.

Richard Tillinghast is the author of *Sleep Watch* (Wesleyan). New work is appearing in *Agenda, Partisan Review, The New Republic* and *Ploughshares*. He lives in San Rafael, California.

Eliot Weinberger is a poet, translator and the editor of *Montemora*. His books of translation include Octavio Paz's *Eagle or Sun?*, a forthcoming volume of Paz's new poetry, and Homero Aridjis' *Exaltation of Light*.

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POETRY FEATURE

Alain Arias-Misson was born in Belgium and raised in the United States. He published the "superfiction" entitled *Confessions of a Murderer, Rapist, Fascist, Bomber, Thief or a Year in the Journal of an Ordinary American* (Swallow Press, 1975). After working in Europe from 1960 to 1976 with the visual poetry movement, he has recently published *The public poem book.*

Charles Elwert teaches creative writing in Illinois and has published work in *Laughing Bear* and *Assembling.*

Scott Helmes works in an architectural firm in St. Paul, Minnesota. His visual work has been shown in Kansas City and on the West Coast, and has been published in *Interstate, Assembling* and *Context.*

Toby Lurie has made phonographic records of his sound poems as well as having published two collections of his poetry: *Conversations and Constructions* and *Conversations With the Past* (Laughing Bear Press). He lives in San Francisco.

Lucia Marcucci is from Florence, Italy, and is a member of "Group 70." She has had numerous exhibitions of her work in Europe and has published several books.

Eugenio Miccini is from Florence and is a member of "Group 70" and also the "Group 63." He is the director of the *Techne* center and review and has won the poetry prize of the city of Florence.

Luciano Ori is from Florence and co-founder of "Group 70." He has published ten books, had numerous personal exhibitions and is an active writer of theoretical articles about *Poesia Visiva.*

Shimizo Toshihiko is active in the VOU group in Tokyo where he has had numerous exhibitions. His books include *Once Again* (New Directions, 1964).

Charles Russell (editor) edits *The American Book Review.*

Takahashi Shoachiro lives in Orioka, Japan. He is active in the VOU and ASA groups in Tokyo and is co-founder of *317,* the visual poetry magazine.

Jiri Valoch lives in Brno, Czechoslovakia and is represented in many European publications. He has had several exhibitions of his work.

Paul de Vree lives in Antwerp. He is editor of *Tafelronde* (Antwerp) and co-founder of *Lotta Poetica* (Brescia, Italy) and *Factotum Books* (Padua).

CHRONICLES

Peter Handke is the Austrian author of *A Sorrow Beyond Dreams, The Left-handed Woman,* and other books. The excerpt published here is from *Fantasies and Prejudices,* a journal, to be published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux in 1980.

James Salter is the author of several novels: A Sport and a Pastime (Paris

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Review Editions, 1967), *Light Years* (Random House) and the forthcoming *Solo Faces* to be published this spring by Little, Brown.

INTERVIEWS

Dr. Paul F. Ferguson is an Instructor of English at the State University College at Brockport. He is a specialist in Medieval literature with interests in modern fiction and detective fiction.

John R. Maier teaches English at the State University of New York at Brockport. He is the author of a number of works on Medieval and Renaissance English literature, the literature of the Ancient Near East, literary criticism, and the interplay between literature and philosophy. A current project is a translation of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* with John Gardner and Richard Henshaw.

Lucas Matthiessen is an Assistant Editor at Penguin Books, a Contributing Editor of *Quest* magazine, and a Contributing Editor of *The Paris Review.*

Sara Matthiessen is a recent graduate of Bennington College. She is now living in New York City.

Frank McConnell is Associate Professor of English at Northwestern University, and author of *The Spoken Seen: Film and the Romantic Imagination* (Johns Hopkins), *Four Postwar American Novelists: Bellow, Mailer, Barth and Pynchon* (University of Chicago), and a forthcoming book on film from Oxford.

Willie Morris is the former editor of *Harper's,* the author of *The Last of the Southern Girls, North Towards Home* and other books. He writes: "As a one-time 10-flat halfback for the Yazoo City, Mississippi, Indians after the advent of the two-platoon system, he knew that Irwin Shaw was the quarterback and safety-man for Brooklyn College long before he started reading Shaw, but once he did, he became a life-long admirer." He lives in Bridgehampton, New York.

ART

Chuck Close was born in Monroe, Washington, in 1940, and currently lives in New York. He has had numerous exhibitions in the United States and Europe, most recently at The Pace Gallery, New York.

Stephanie Brody Lederman was born in New York City. Her works on paper have been exhibited recently at the Franklin Furnace, New York, and Susan Caldwell Gallery, New York. She will have a one-person exhibition at the Kathryn Markel Gallery, New York, in October.

Donald Sultan was born in Asheville, North Carolina, in 1951 and currently lives in New York. His paintings were included in the 1979 Biennial Exhibition at the Whitney Museum and in a one-man exhibition at Willard Gallery, New York.

Allen Ruppersberg was born in Cleveland in 1944. He currently lives in Santa Monica, California. His work has been included in recent exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Guggenheim Museum, New York, and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

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ADDENDUM: The Paris Review very much regrets the inadvertent omission of the last stanza of the poem, "Killing Floor" by Ai. The poem is printed here in its complete form.

Ai

Killing Floor

1 Russia, 1927

On the day the sienna-skinned man
held my shoulders between his spade-shaped hands,
easing me down into the azure waters of Jordan,
I woke ninety-three million miles from myself,
Lev Davidovich Bronstein,
shoulder-deep in the Volga,
while the cheap dye of my black silk shirt darkened
the water.

My head wet, water caught in my lashes.
Am I blind?
I rub my eyes, then wade back to shore,
undress and lie down,
until Stalin comes from his place beneath the birch tree.
He folds my clothes
and I button myself in my marmot coat,
and together we start the long walk back to Moscow.
He doesn't ask, *what did you see in the river?*
but I hear the hosts of a man drowning in water and
holiness,
and the castrati voices I can't recognize,
skating on knives, from trees, from air
on the thin ice of my last night in Russia.
Leon Trotsky. Bread.
I want to scream, but silence holds my tongue
with small spade-shaped hands
and only this comes, so quietly
Stalin has to press his ear to my mouth:
I have only myself. Put me on the train.
I won't look back.

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2 Mexico, 1940

At noon today, I woke from a nightmare:
my friend Jacques ran toward me with an axe,
as I stepped from the train in Alma Ata.
He was dressed in yellow satin pants and shirt.
A marigold in winter.
When I held out my arms to embrace him,
he raised the axe and struck me at the neck,
my head fell to one side, hanging only by skin.
A river of sighs poured from the cut.

3 Mexico, August 20, 1940

The machine gun bullets hit
my wife in the legs,
then zigzagged up her body.
I took the shears, cut open her gown
and lay on top of her for hours.
Blood soaked through my clothes
and when I tried to rise, I couldn't.

I wake then. Another nightmare.
I rise from my desk, walk to the bedroom
and sit down at my wife's mirrored vanity.
I rouge my cheeks and lips,
stare at my bone-white, speckled egg of a face:
lined and empty.
I lean forward and see Jacques' reflection.
I half turn, smile, then turn back to the mirror.
He moves from the doorway,
lifts the pickaxe
and strikes the top of my head.
My brain splits.
The pickaxe keeps going
and when it hits the tile floor,
it flies from his hands,
a black dove on whose back I ride,
two men, one cursing,
the other blessing all things:
Lev Davidovich Bronstein,
I step from Jordan without you.

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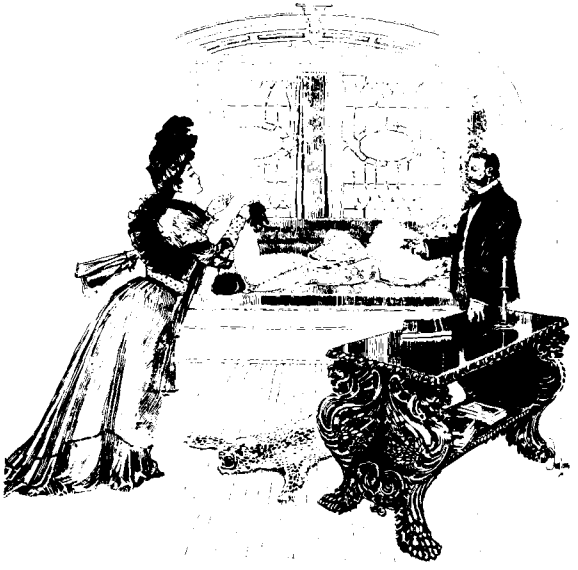

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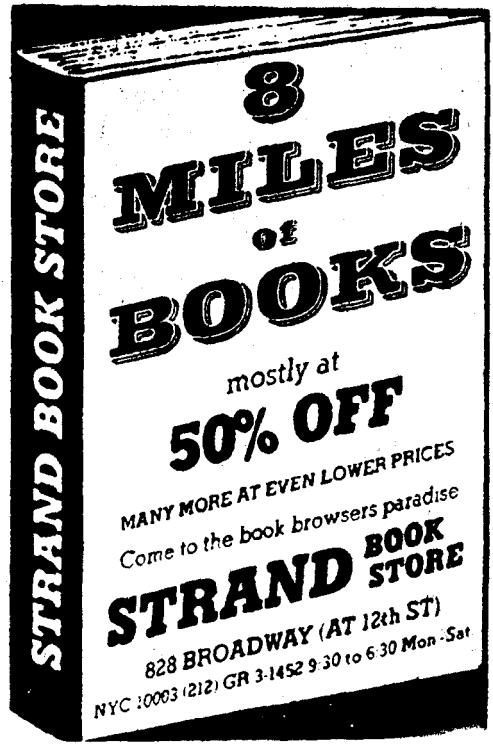

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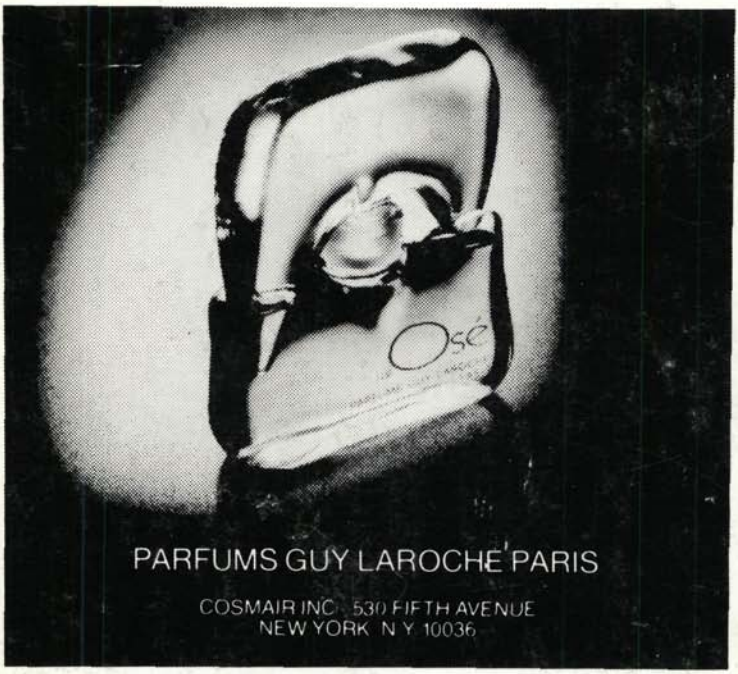

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